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THE RIFLE RANGERS; or, ADVENTURES IN SOUTHERN MEXICO.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID,

AUTHOR OF "THE HEADLESS HORSEMAN," "THE DEATH-SHOT," "THE SCALP HUNTERS," ETC., ETC.



A HUMAN FIGURE RUSHED OUT OF THE BUSHES, AND, CONFRONTING ME, EXCLAIMED: "HA! MONSIEUR LE CAPITAINE! BLOW FOR BLOW!"

Popular Edition of Captain Mayne Reid's Works.

The Rifle Rangers;

OR,

Adventures in Southern Mexico.

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CHAPTER I.

AN ADVENTURE AMONG THE CREOLES OF NEW ORLEANS.

In the 'fall' of 1846, I found myself in the city of New Orleans, filling up one of those pauses that occur between the chapters of an eventful life—doing nothing.

The war between the United States and Mexico had commenced. A warlike ardor seized upon me; and clutching, not the sword, but my pen, I wrote to the War Department for a commission; and, summoning all my patience, awaited the answer.

November came, but no commission. Impatience and ennui had fairly mastered me. The time hung heavily upon my hands.

"How can I best pass the hour? I shall go to the French opera, and hear Calvé."

Such were my reflections as I sat one evening in my solitary chamber. In obedience to this impulse, I repaired to the theater; but the bellicose strains of the opera, instead of soothing, only heightened my warlike enthusiasm, and I walked homeward, abusing, as I went, the President, the Secretary-at-war, and the whole Government—legislative, judicial, and executive. "Republics are ungrateful," soliloquized I, in a spiteful mood. "I have surely put in strong enough for it; my political connections—besides, the Government owes me a favor—"

"Clear out, ye niggers! Durn yer! what de yer want?"

This was a voice that reached me as I passed through the dark corner of the Faubourg Tremé. Then followed some exclamations in French; a shuffle ensued, a pistol went off, and I heard the same voice again calling out—

"Four till one! Injuns! Murder! Help, hyur!"

I ran up. It was very dark; but the glimmer of a distant lamp enabled me to perceive a man out in the middle of the street, defending himself against four others. He was a man of giant size, and flourished a bright weapon, which I took to be a bowie-knife, while his assailants struck at him on all sides with sticks and stilettoes. A small boy ran back and forth upon the banquette, calling for help.

Supposing it to be some street quarrel, I endeavored to separate the parties by remonstrance. I rushed between them, holding out my cane; but a sharp cut across the knuckles, which I had received from one of the small men, together with his evident intention to follow it up, robbed me of all zeal for pacific mediation; and keeping my eye upon the one who had cut me, I drew a pistol (I could not otherwise defend myself), and fired. The man fell dead in his tracks, without a groan. His comrades, hearing me re-cock, took to their heels, and disappeared up a neighboring alley.

The whole scene did not occupy the time you have spent in reading this relation of it. One minute I was plodding quietly homeward; the next, I stood in the middle of the street; beside me a stranger of gigantic proportions; at my feet a black mass of dead humanity, half-doubled up in the mud as it had fallen; on the banquette, the slight, shivering form of a boy; while above and around were silence and darkness.

I was beginning to fancy the whole thing a dream, when the voice of the man at my side dispelled this illusion.

"Mister," said he, placing his arms akimbo, and facing me, "if ye'll tell me yur name, I ain't a-gwine to forgit it. No, Bob Linkin ain't that sorter."

"What! Bob Linkin? Bob Linkin of the Peaks?"

In the voice I had recognized a celebrated mountain trapper, and an old acquaintance, whom I had not met for several years.

"Why, Lord save us from Injuns! it ain't you, Cap'n Haller! May I be dog-goned if it ain't! Whooray!—whoop! I knowed it warn't no store-keeper fired that shot. Harroo! whar are yur, Jack?"

"Here I am!" answered the boy, from the pavement.

"Kum hyur, then. Ye ain't badly skeert, air yur?"

"No," firmly responded the boy, crossing over.

"I tuk him from a scoundrelly Crow, thet I overhauled on a fork of the Yellerstone. He gi'n me a long pedigree; that is, afore I kilt the skunk. He made out as how his people bed tuk the boy from the Kimanches, who bed brought him from somewhar down the Grande. I know'd it wur all bamboozle. The boy's white, American white. Who ever see'd a yeller-bided Mexikin with them eyes and ha'r? Jack, this hyur's Cap'n Haller. If yur kin iver save his

life by givin' y'ur own, yur must do it, do ye hear?"

"I will," said the boy, resolutely.

"Come, Lincoln," I interposed; "these conditions are not necessary. You remember I was in your debt."

"Ain't worth mentionin', Cap; let bygones be bygones."

"But what brought you to New Orleans? or, more particularly, how came you into this scrape?"

"Wal, cap'n, bein' as the last question is the most partic'lar, I'll gi'n yur the answer to it fust. I hed jest twelve dollars in my pouch, an' I tuk a idee inter my head thet I mout as well double it. So I stepped into a shanty whar they wur a-playin' craps. After bettin' a good spell, I won somewhar about a hundred dollars. Not likin' the sign I see'd about, I tuk Jack and put out. Wait jest as I was kummin' roun' this hyur corner, four fellers—them ye see'd—run out and jumped me, like so many catamounts. I tuk them for the same chaps I hed see'd parleyvooin' at the craps-table; an' tho't they wur only jokin', till one of them gi'n me a sockdologer over the head, an' fired a pistol. I then drewed my bowie, an' the scrimmage begun; an' thet's all I know about it, cap'n, more'n y'urself."

"Let's see if it's all up with this'n," continued the hunter, stooping. "P'deed, yes," he drawled out; "dead as a buck. Thunder! ye've gi'n it him between the eyes, plum! He is one of the fellers, es my name's Bob Linkin. I kud sw'ar to them mowstaches among a million."

At this moment a patrol of night gendarmes came up; and Lincoln, and Jack, and myself were carried off to the calaboose, where we spent the remainder of the night. In the morning we were brought before the recorder; but I had taken the precaution to send for some friends, who introduced me to his worship in a proper manner. As my story corroborated Lincoln's, and his mine, and "Jack's" substantiated both; and as the comrades of the dead Creole did not appear, and he himself was identified by the police as a notorious robber, the recorder dismissed the case, as one of "justifiable homicide in self-defense," and the hunter and I were permitted to go our way without further interruption.

CHAPTER II.

A VOLUNTEER RENDEZVOUS.

"Now, Cap," said Lincoln, as we seated ourselves at the table of a *café*, "I'll answer t'other question yur put last night. I wur up on the head of Arkansas, an' hearin' they wur raisin' volunteers down hyur, I kim down ter jine. It ain't often I trouble the settlements; but I've a mighty puncheon, as the Frenchman says, to hev a crack at them yellor-bellies. I hain't forgot a mean trick they sarked me two yeern ago, up thar by Santer Fe."

"And so you have joined the volunteers?"

"That's sartin. But why ain't you a-gwine to Mexico? That 'ere's a wonder to me, Cap, why you ain't. Thur's a mighty grist o' 'venturin', I heern; beats Injun fightin' all holler, an' y'ur jest the beaver I'd spect to find in that 'ar dam. Why don't you go?"

"So I purposed long since, and wrote on to Washington for a commission; but the Government seems to have forgotten me."

"Dod rot the Government! git a commission for y'urself."

"How?" I asked.

"Jine us, an' be illected—thet's how."

This had crossed my mind before; but, believing myself a stranger among these volunteers, I had given up the idea. Once joined, he who failed in being elected an officer was fated to shoulder a fire-lock. It was neck or nothing then. Lincoln set things in a new light. They were strangers to each other, he affirmed, and my chances of being elected would therefore be as good as any man's.

"I'll tell you what it is," said he; "you kin kum with me ter the rendezvoos, an' see for y'urself; but if ye'll only jine, an' licker freely, I'll lay a pack o' beaver ag'in' the skin of a mink that they'll illect ye captain of the company."

"Even a lieutenantcy," I interposed.

"Ne'er a bit of it, Cap. Go the big figger. Tain't more nor y'ur entitled to. I kin git yur a good heist among some hunters thet's thur; but that's a buffalo drove o' them parleyvoos, an' a feller among 'em, one of these hyur Creeholes, thet's been a-showin' off an' fencin' with a pair of skewers from mornin' till night. I'd be dog-gone glad to see the starch taken out o' that feller."

I took my resolution. In half an hour after I was standing in a large hall or armory. It was the rendezvous of the volunteers, nearly all of whom were present; and perhaps a more variegated assemblage was never grouped together. Every nationality seemed to have its representative; and for variety of language the company might have rivaled the masons of Babel.

Near the head of the room was a table, upon which lay a large parchment, covered with signatures. I added mine to the list. In the act I had staked my liberty. It was an oath.

"These are my rivals—the candidates for office," thought I, looking at a group who stood near the table. Some of them already affected a half-undress uniform, and most wore forage-caps with glazed covers, and army buttons over the ears.

"Ha! Clayley!" said I, recognizing an old acquaintance. This was a young cotton-planter—a free, dashing spirit—who had sacrificed a fortune at the shrines of Momus and Bacchus.

"Why, Haller, old fellow! glad to see you. How have you been? Think of going with us?"

"Yes; I have signed. Who is that man?"

"He's a Creole; his name is Dubrose."

It was a face purely Norman, and one that would halt the wandering eye in any collection. Of oval outline, framed by a profusion of black hair, wavy and perfumed. A round black eye, spanned by brows arching and glossy. Whiskers that belonged rather to the chin, leaving bare the broad jawbone, expressive of firmness and resolve. Firm, thin lips, handsomely mustached; when parted, displaying teeth well set and of dazzling whiteness. The smile was cynical; the eye cold, yet bright; but the brightness was altogether *animal*—more the light of instinct than intellect. A face that presented in its expression a strange admixture of the lovely and the hideous—physically fair, morally dark—beautiful, yet brutal!

"The fellow is likely to be our captain," whispered Clayley, noticing that I observed the man with more than ordinary attention. "By the way," continued he, "I don't half like it. I believe he's an infernal scoundrel."

"Such are my impressions. But if that be his character, how can he be elected?"

"Oh! no one here knows another; and this fellow is a splendid swordsman, like all the Creoles, you know. He has used the trick to advantage, and has created an impression. By the by, now I recollect, you are no slouch at that yourself. What are you up for?"

"Captain," I replied.

"Good! Then we must go the 'whole hog' in your favor. I have put in for the first lieutenantcy, so we won't run foul of each other. Let us 'hitch teams.'"

"With all my heart," said I.

"You came in with that long-bearded hunter. Is he your frierd?"

"He is."

"Then I can tell you that among these fellows he's a 'whole team, and a cross dog under the wagon' to boot. See him! he's at it already."

I had noticed Lincoln in conversation with several leather-legging gentry like himself, whom I knew from their costume and appearance to be backwoodsmen. All at once these saturnine characters commenced moving about the room, and entering into conversation with men whom they had not hitherto deigned to notice.

"They are canvassing," said Clayley.

Lincoln, brushing past, whispered in my ear:

"Cap'n, I understan' these hyur critters better'n you kin. Yer must mix among 'em—mix and licker—thet's the idee."

"Good advice," said Clayley; "but if you could only take the shine out of that fellow at fencing, the thing's done at once. By Jove! I think you might do it, Haller!"

"I have made up my mind to try, at all events."

"Not until the last day—a few hours before the election."

"You are right. It would be better to wait—I shall take your advice. In the mean time, let us follow that of Lincoln—mix and licker."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Clayley, "let us. Come, boys!" he added, turning to a very thirsty-looking group; "let's all take a 'smile.' Here, Cap'tain Haller! allow me to introduce you," and the next moment I was introduced to a crowd of very seedy-looking gentlemen, and the moment after we were clinking glasses, and chatting as familiarly as if we had been friends of forty years' standing.

During the next three days the enrollment continued, and the canvass was kept up with energy. The election was to take place on the evening of the fourth.

Meanwhile my dislike for my rival had been strengthened by closer observation; and, as is general in such cases, the feeling was reciprocal.

On the afternoon of the day in question we stood before each other, foil in hand, both of us nerved by an intense, though as yet *unspoken*, enmity. This had been observed by most of the spectators, who approached and formed a circle around us, all of them highly interested in the result—which, they knew, would be an index to the election.

The room was an armory, and all kinds of weapons for military practice were kept in it. Each had helped himself to his foil. One of the weapons was without a button, and sharp enough to be dangerous in the hands of an angry man. I noticed that my antagonist had chosen this one.

"Your foil is not in order; it has lost the button—has it not?" I observed.

"Ah! monsieur, pardon. I did not perceive that."

"A strange oversight," muttered Clayley, with a significant glance.

The Frenchman returned the imperfect foil and took another.

"Have you a choice, monsieur?" I inquired.

"No, thank you; I am satisfied."

We commenced unsteadily. Both were excited by unusual emotions, and our first thrusts were neither skillfully aimed nor parried. We fenced with the energy of anger, and the sparks crackled from the friction of the grazing steel. For several minutes it was a doubtful contest; but I grew cooler every instant, while a slight advantage I had gained irritated my adversary. At length, by a lucky hit, I succeeded in planting the button of my foil upon his cheek. A cheer greeted this, and I could hear the voice of Lincoln shouting out:

"Wal done, cap'n! whooray for the mount-men!"

This added to the exasperation of the Frenchman, causing him to strike wilder than before; and I found no difficulty in repeating my former thrust. It was now a sure hit; and, after a few passes, I thrust my adversary for the third time, drawing blood. The cheer rung out louder than before. The Frenchman could no longer conceal his mortification; and grasping his foil in both hands, he snapped it over his knee, with an oath. Then, muttering some words about "better weapons" and "another opportunity," he strode off among the spectators.

Two hours after the combat I was his captain. Clayley was elected first lieutenant; and in a week from that time the company was "mustered" into the service of the United States Government, and armed and equipped as an independent corps of "Rifle Rangers." On the 20th of January, 1847, a noble ship was bearing us over the blue water, toward the shores of a hostile land.

CHAPTER III.

LIFE ON THE ISLAND OF LOBOS.

AFTER calling at Brazos Santiago, we were ordered to land upon the island of Lobos, fifty miles north of Vera Cruz. This was to be our "drill rendezvous." We soon reached the island. Detachments from several regiments debarked together; the jungle was attacked; and in a few hours the green grove had disappeared, and in its place stood the white pyramids of canvas with their floating flags. It was the work of a day. When the sun rose over Lobos it was a desert isle, thickly covered with a jungle of mangrove, manzanil, and icaco-trees, green as an emerald. How changed the scene! When the moon looked down upon this same islet, it seemed as if a warlike city had sprung suddenly out of the sea, with a navy at anchor in front of its bannered walls!

In a few days six full regiments had encamped upon the hitherto uninhabited island, and nothing was heard but the voice of war.

These regiments were all "raw," and my duty with others, consisted in "licking them into shape." It was drill, drill, from morning till night; and, by yearly tattoo, I was always glad to crawl into my tent and go to sleep—such sleep as a man can get among scorpions, lizards, and soldier-crabs; for the little islet seemed to have within its boundaries a specimen of every reptile that came safely out of the ark.

The 22d of February being Washington's birthday, I could not get to bed as usual. I was compelled to accept an invitation, obtained by Clayley, to the tent of Major Twing, where they were—using Clayley's own words—"to have a night of it."

After tattoo we set out for the major's marquee, which lay near the center of the islet, in a coppice of caoutchouc-trees. We had no difficulty in finding it, guided by the jingling of glasses and the mingling of many voices in boisterous laughter.

On each side of the table was a row of colonels, captains, subalterns and doctors, seated without regard to rank or age, according to the order in which they had "dropped in." There were also some naval officers, and a sprinkling of strange, half-sailor-looking men, the skippers of transport brigs, steamboats, etc., for Twing was a thorough republican in his entertainments; besides, the day leveled all distinctions.

At the head of the table was the major himself—one of those wiry, hard-headed, hard-drinking devils, who always carried a large pewter flask suspended from his shoulders by a green string; and without this flask no one ever saw Major Twing. He could not have stuck to it more closely had it been his badge of rank. It was not unusual, on the route, to hear some wearied officer exclaim: "If I only had a pull at old Twing's pewter!" and "equal to Twing's flask" was an expression which stamped the quality of any liquor as superfine. Such was one of the major's peculiarities, though by no means the only one.

As my friend and I made our appearance under the fly, the company was in high glee. Clayley was a great favorite with the major, and at once caught his eye.

"Ha, Clayley! that you? Walk in with your friend. Find seats there, gentlemen."

"Captain Haller—Major Twing," said Clayley, introducing me.

"Happy to know you, captain. Can you find seats there? No. Come up this way. Cudjo, boy, run over to Colonel Marshall's tent and steal a couple of stools. Adge, twist the neck off that bottle. Where's the screw? Hang that screw! Where is it, anyhow?"

"Never mind the screw, mage," cried the adjutant; "I've got a patent universal here." So saying, this gentleman held out a champagne bottle in his left hand, and with a down-stroke of his right cut the neck off, as square as if it had been filed!

"Nate!" ejaculated Hennessy, an Irish officer, who sat near the head of the table, and who evidently admired that sort of thing.

"What we call a Kentucky corkscrew," said the adjutant, coolly. "It offers a double advantage. It saves time, and you get the wine clear of—"

"My respects, gentlemen! Captain Haller—Mr. Clayley."

"Thank you, Major Twing. To you, sir!"

"Ha! the stools at last! Only one! What the deuce, Cudjo? Come, gentlemen—squeeze yourselves up this way. Here, Clayley, old boy; here's a cartridge-box. Adge! up-end that box. So—give us your fist, old fellow; how are you? Sit down captain, sit down. Cigars, there!"

As soon as we had got seated, several voices were heard vociferating, "The song! the song! round with the song!" and I learned that the order of the night was "a song, a story, or half-a-dozen bottles of champagne."

"Sibley's turn next!" shouted one.

"Sibley! Sibley!" cried several voices.

"Well, gentlemen," said the officer called upon, a young South Carolinian, "as I make no pretensions to singing, I will endeavor to clear the forfeit by a story."

"Good! A story, by all means—nothing like variety."

"Liftin'ant, take a trifle of the squeezed lemon before ye begin."

"Thank you, Captain Hennessy. Your health, sir."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHOT THROUGH CANVAS.

AT that moment the report of a musket was heard without the tent, and simultaneously a bullet whistled through the canvas. It knocked the foraging-cap from the head of Captain Hennessy, and, striking a decanter, shattered the glass into a thousand pieces!

"A devilish nate shot that, I don't care who fired it," said Hennessy, coolly picking up his cap. "An inch of a miss—good as a mile," added he, thrusting his thumb into the bullet-hole.

By this time every officer present was upon his feet, most of them rushing toward the front of the marquee. A dozen voices called out together:

"Who fired that gun?"

There was no answer, and several plunged into the thicket in pursuit. The chaparral was dark and silent, and these returned after a fruitless search.

"Some soldier, whose gun has gone off by accident," suggested Colonel Harding. "The fellow has run away to avoid being put under arrest."

"Come, gentlemen, take your sates again," said Hennessy; "let the poor devil slide—yez may be thankful it wasn't a shell."

"You, captain, have most cause to be grateful for the character of the missile."

"By my sowl, I don't know about that!—a shell or a twenty-four would have grazed me all the same, but a big shot would have been mighty inconvenient to the head of my friend Haller, here!"

This was true. My head was nearly in range; and, had the shot been a large one, it would have struck me upon the left temple. As it was, I felt the "wind" of the bullet, and already began to suffer a painful sensation over the eye.

"I'm mighty curious to know which of us the fellow has missed, captain," said Hennessy, turning to me as he spoke.

"If it were not a 'bull,' I should say I hope neither of us. I'm inclined to think with Colonel Harding that it was altogether an accident."

"By the powers! an ugly accident, too, that has spoiled five dollars' worth of an illigant cap, and a pint of as good brandy as ever was mixed with hot water and lemon-juice."

"Plenty left, captain," cried the major.

"Come, gentlemen, don't let this damp us—fill up! fill up! Adge, out with the corks! Cudjo, where's the screw?—curse that screw!"

"Never mind the screw, mage," cried the adjutant, repeating his old trick upon the neck of a fresh bottle, which, nipped off under the wire, fell upon a heap of others that had preceded it.

And the wine again foamed and sparkled, and glasses circled round, and the noisy revelry waxed as loud as ever. The incident of the shot was soon forgotten. Songs were sung, and stories told, and toasts drank; and with song and sentiment, and toast and story, and the wild excitement of wit and wine, the night

waned away. With many of those young hearts, bold with hope and burning with ambition, it was the last "Twenty-second" they would ever celebrate. Half of them never hailed another!

CHAPTER V.

A SKELETON ADVENTURE.

IT was past midnight when I withdrew from the scene of wassail. Clayley was one of those tireless spirits who could "drink all night till broad daylight," and, as he preferred remaining for some time longer, I walked out alone. My blood was flushed, and I strolled down upon the beach to enjoy the cool, fresh breeze that was blowing in from the Mexican Sea.

I continued my walk along the beach until I had reached that point of the island directly opposite to the mainland of Mexico. Here the chaparral grew thick and tangled, running down to the water's edge, where it ended in a clump of mangroves. As no troops were encamped here, the islet had not been cleared at this point, and the jungle was dark and solitary.

The moon was now going down, and straggling shadows began to fall upon the water.

Certainly some one skulked into the bushes!—a rustling in the leaves—yes! some fellow who has strayed beyond the line of sentries, and is afraid to return to camp. Ha! a boat! a skiff it is—a net and buoys! As I live, 'tis a Mexican craft!—who can have brought it here? Some fisherman from the coast of Tusan. No, he would not venture; it must be—

A strange suspicion flashed across my mind, and I rushed through the mangrove thicket, where I had observed the object a moment before. I had not proceeded fifty yards when I saw the folly of this movement. I found myself in the midst of a labyrinth, dark and dismal, surrounded by a wall of leaves and brambles. The branches of the mangroves, rooted at their top, barred up the path, and vines laced them together.

"If they be spies," thought I, "I have taken the worst plan to catch them. I may as well go through now. I cannot be distant from the rear of the camp. Ugh! how dismal!"

I pushed on, climbing over fallen trunks, and twining myself through the viny cordage. The creepers clung to my neck—thorns penetrated my skin—the *mezquite* slapped me in the face, drawing blood. I laid my hand upon a pendent limb; a clammy object struggled under my touch, with a terrified yet spiteful violence, and freeing itself, sprung over my shoulder, and scampered off among the fallen leaves. I felt its fetid breath, as the cold scales brushed against my cheek. It was the hideous iguana!

A huge bat flapped its sail-like wings in my face, and returned again and again, breathing a mephitic odor that caused me to gasp. Twice I struck at it with my sword, cutting only the empty air. A third time my blade was caught in the trellis of parasites. It was horrible; I felt terrified to contend with such strange enemies.

At length, after a continued struggle, an opening appeared before me—a glade; I rushed to the welcome spot.

"What a relief!" I ejaculated, emerging from the leafy darkness. Suddenly, I started back with a cry of horror; my limbs refused to act; the sword fell from my grasp; and I stood palsied and transfixed, as if by a bolt from heaven!

Before me, and not over three paces distant, the image of Death himself rose out of the earth, and stretched forth his skeleton arms to clutch me! It was no phantom. There was the white, naked skull, with its eyeless sockets; the long fleshless limbs; the open, serrated ribs; the long, jointed fingers of Death himself!

As my bewildered brain took in these objects, I heard a noise in the bushes, as of persons engaged in an angry struggle.

"Emile! Emile!" cried a female voice, "you shall not murder him—you shall not!"

"Off! off! Marie, let me go!" was shouted in the rough accents of a man.

"Oh, no!" continued the female, "you shall not—no—no—no!"

"Curses on the woman!—there! let me go now!"

There was a sound as of some one struck with violence—a scream—and at the same moment a human figure rushed out of the bushes, and, confronting me, exclaimed:

"Ha! Monsieur le Capitaine! *coup pour coup!*"

I heard no more; a heavy blow, descending upon my temples, deprived me of all power, and I fell senseless to the earth.

When I returned to consciousness, the first objects I saw were the huge brown whiskers of Lincoln; then Lincoln himself; then the pale face of the boy Jack, and finally, the forms of several soldiers of my company. I saw that I was in my own tent, and stretched upon my camp-bed.

"What!—how!—what's the matter—what's this?" I said, raising my hands to the bandage of wet linen that bound my temples.

"Keep still, cap'n!" said Bob, taking my hand from the fillet and placing it by my side.

"Och! by my sowl, he's over it; thank the

Lord for his goodness," said Chane, an Irish soldier.

"Over what? what has happened to me?" I inquired.

"Och, cap'tin, yer honner, you've been nearly murdered, and all by thim Frinch scoundrels, bad luck to their dirty frog-atin' picthers!"

"Murdered! French scoundrels! Bob, what is it?"

"Why, yer see, cap'n, ye've had a cut hyur over the head, and we think it's them Frenchmen."

"Oh! I remember now; a blow—but the Death?—the Death?"

I started up from the bed as the phantom of my night adventure returned to my imagination.

"The Death, cap'n?—what do yer mean?" inquired Lincoln, holding me in his strong arms.

"Oh! the cap'n manes the skilleton, maybe, said Chane.

"What skeleton?" I demanded.

"Why, an owld skilleton the boys found in the chaparril, yer honner. They hung it to a tree, and we found yer honner there, with the skilleton swinging over ye like a sign. Och! the Frinch bastes!"

I made no further inquiries about the "Death."

"But where are the Frenchmen?" asked I, after a moment.

"Clane gone, yer honner," replied Chane.

"Gone?"

"Yes, cap'n; that's so as he sez it," answered Lincoln.

"Gone! What do you mean?" I inquired.

"Desarted, cap'n."

"How do you know that?"

"Because they ain't here."

"On the island?"

"Searched it all—every bush."

"But who? which of the French?"

"Dubrosc and that 'ar boy that was always with him—both desarted."

"Ay, and the devil go wid them! He'll niver hiv his own till he gets a houlit of Mither Dubrosc, bad 'cess to him!"

"You are sure they are missing?"

"Looked high and low, cap'n. Gravenitz see'd Dubrosc steal into the chaparril with his musket. Shortly afterward he heern a shot, but thought nothin' of it till this mornin', when one of the sodgers foun' a Spanish sombrary out thar, and Chane heern some'dy say the shot passed through Major Twing's markey. Besides, we foun' this butcher-knife where yer was lyin'."

Lincoln here held up a species of Mexican sword called *machete*.

"Hal—well?"

"That's all, cap'n; only it's my belief there was Mexikins on this island, and them Frenchmen's gone with them."

After Lincoln left me I lay musing on this still somewhat mysterious affair. My memory, however, gradually grew clearer, and the events of the preceding night soon became linked together, and formed a complete chain. The shot that passed so near my head in Twing's tent—the boat—the French words I had heard before I received the blow—and the exclamation, "*Coup pour coup*!"—all convinced me that Lincoln's conjectures were right.

Dubrosc had fired the shot, and struck the blow that had left me senseless.

But who could the woman be whose voice I had heard pleading in my behalf?

My thoughts reverted to the boy who had gone off with Dubrosc, and whom I had often observed in the company of the latter. A strange attachment appeared to exist between them, in which the boy seemed to be the devoted slave of the strong, fierce Creole. Could this be a woman?

I recollected having been struck with his delicate features, the softness of his voice, and the smallness of his hands. There were other points, besides, in the *tournure* of the boy's figure, that had appeared singular to me. I had frequently observed the eyes of this lad bent upon me, when Dubrosc was not present, with a strange and unaccountable expression.

Many other peculiarities connected with the boy and Dubrosc, which at the time had passed unnoticed and unheeded, now presented themselves to my recollection, all tending to prove the identity of the boy with the woman whose voice I had heard in the thicket.

I could not help smiling at the night's adventures; determined, however, to conceal that part which related to the skeleton.

In a few days my strength was restored. The cut I had received was not deep—thanks to my forage cap and the dullness of the Frenchman's weapon.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LANDING AT SACRIFICIOS.

EARLY in the month of March, the troops at Lobos were re-embarked, and dropped down to the roadstead of Anton Lizardo. The American fleet was already at anchor there, and in a few days above a hundred sail of transports had joined it.

The landing was to take place on the 9th; and the point of debarkation fixed upon was the

beach opposite the island of Sacrificios, just out of range of the guns of Vera Cruz.

The 9th of March rose like a dream, bright, balmy, and beautiful. The sea was scarcely stirred by the gentlest breeze of the tropics; but this breeze, light as it was, blew directly in our favor.

At an early hour I observed a strange movement among the ships composing the fleet. Signals were changing in quick succession, and boats gliding rapidly to and fro.

Before daybreak the huge surf-boats had been drawn down from their moorings, and with long hempen hawsers attached to the ships and steamers.

The descent was about to be made. The ominous cloud which had hung dark and threatening over the shores of Mexico was about to burst upon that devoted land. But where? The enemy could not tell, and were preparing to receive us on the adjacent shore.

The black cylinders began to smoke, and the murky cloud rolled down upon the water, half obscuring the fleet. Here and there a broad sail, freshly unfurled, hung stiffly from the yard; the canvas, escaping from its gasket fastenings, had not yet been braced round to the breeze.

Soldiers were seen standing along the decks; some in full equipments, clutching the bright barrels of their muskets; while others were buckling on their white belts, or cramming their cartouche-boxes.

Officers, in sash and sword, paced the polished quarter-decks, or talked earnestly in groups, or watched with eager eyes the motions of the various ships.

Unusual sounds were heard on all sides. The deep-toned chorus of the sailor—the creaking of the capstan and the clanking of the iron cogs—the "heave-ho!" at the windlass, and the grating of the huge anchor-chain, as link after link rasped through the rusty ring—sounds that warned us to make ready for a change.

In the midst of these came the brisk rolling of a drum. It was answered by another, and another, and still another, until all voices were drowned by the deafening noise. Then followed the mingling shouts of command—a rushing over the decks—and streams of blue-clad men poured down the dark sides, and seated themselves in the surf-boats. These were filled in a twinkling, and all was silent as before. Every voice was hushed in expectation, and every eye bent upon the little black steamer which carried the commander-in-chief.

Suddenly a cloud of smoke rose up from her quarter; a sheet of flame shot out horizontally; and the report of a heavy gun shook the atmosphere like an earthquake. Before its echoes had subsided, a deafening cheer ran simultaneously through the fleet; and the ships, all together, as if impelled by some hidden and supernatural power, broke from their moorings, and dashed through the water with the velocity of the wind. Away to the north-west, in an exciting race; away for the island of Sacrificios!

On struggled the ships, bending to the breeze, and cleaving the crystal water with their bold bows; on the steamers, beating the blue waves into a milky-way, and dragging the laden boats in their foamy track. On followed the boats through the hissing and frothy caldron. Loud rolled the drum, loud brayed the bugle, and loud huzzas echoed from the adjacent shores.

Already the foe was alarmed and alert. Light horsemen with streaming haste galloped up the coast. Lancers, with gay trappings and long pennons, appeared through the openings of the hills. Foaming, prancing steeds flew with light artillery over the naked ridges, dashing madly down deep defiles, and crushing the cactus with their whirling wheels. "Andela! Andela!" was their cry. In vain they urged their horses—in vain they drove the spur deep and bloody into their smoking sides. The elements were against them, and in favor of their foes.

The alarm spread up the coast. Bugles were sounding, and horsemen galloped through the streets of Vera Cruz. The alarm-drum beat in the plaza, and the long roll echoed in every *cuartel*.

Signal-rockets shot up from San Juan, and were answered by others from Santiago and Concepcion.

Thousands of dark forms clustered upon the roofs of the city and the ramparts of the castle; and thousands of pale lips whispered in accents of terror, "They come! they come!"

The fleet was almost within long range, the black, buoyant hulls bounding fearlessly over the water. The eager crowd thickened upon the walls. The artillerists of Santiago had gathered around their guns, silent and waiting orders. Already the burning fuse was sending forth its sulphurous smell, and the dry powder lay temptingly on the touch, when a quick, sharp cry was heard along the walls and battlements—a cry of mingled rage, disappointment and dismay.

The foremost ship had swerved suddenly from the track, and, bearing sharply to the left, was running down under the shelter of Sacrificios.

The next ship followed her guide, and the

next, and the next; and, before the astonished multitude recovered from their surprise, the whole fleet had come to within pistol-shot of the island!

The enemy now, for the first time, perceived the ruse, and began to calculate its results. Those giant ships, that but a moment ago seemed rushing to destruction, had rounded to at a safe distance, and were preparing, with the speed and skillfulness of a perfect discipline, to pour a hostile host upon the defenseless shores. In vain the cavalry bugle called their horsemen to the saddle; in vain the artillery car rattled along the streets; both would be too late!

Meanwhile, the ships let fall their anchors, with a plunge, and a rasping, and a rattle. The sails came down upon the yards; and sailors swung themselves into the great surf-boats, and mixed with the soldiers, and seized the oars.

The report of a single gun was at length heard from the ship of the commander-in-chief; and, as if by one impulse, a thousand oars struck the water, and flung up the spray upon their broad blades.

And now we neared the shore, and officers sprung to their feet, and stood with their swords drawn; and soldiers half sat, half crouched, clutching their muskets. And the keels gritted upon the gravelly bed; and, at the signal, a thousand men, in one plunge, flung themselves into the water, and dashed madly through the surf. Thousands followed, holding their cartridge-boxes breast-high; and blades were glancing, and bayonets gleaming, and banners waving; and under glancing blades, and gleaming bayonets, and waving banners, the dark mass rushed high upon the beach.

A color-sergeant, springing forward, rushed up the steep sides of a sand-hill, and planted his flag upon its snowy ridge.

As the well-known banner swung out upon the breeze, a cheer, wild and thrilling, ran along the line; a hundred answering flags were hauled up through the fleet; the ships of war saluted with full broadsides; and the guns of San Juan, now for the first time waking from their lethargic silence, poured forth their loudest thunder.

The sun was just setting as our column commenced its advance inward. After winding for a short distance through the defiles of the sand-hills, we halted for the night, our left wing resting upon the beach.

The soldiers bivouacked without tents, sleeping upon their arms, with the soft sand for their couch and the cartridge-box for their pillow.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CITY OF THE TRUE CROSS.

AT break of day on the 10th, the army took up its line of march through hills of sand-drift. On the 11th the Orizava road was crossed, and the light troops of the enemy were brushed from the neighboring hills. On the morning of the 12th, the investment was complete.

Vera Cruz lay within a semicircle—around its center. The half circumference was a chain of hostile regiments that embraced the city in their concave arc. The right of this chain pitched its tents opposite the Isle Sacrificios; while five miles off to the north, its left rested upon the hamlet Vergara. The sea covered the complement of this circle, guarded by a fleet of dark and warlike ships.

After tattoo-beat on the night of the 12th, with a party of my brother officers, I ascended the high hill around which winds the road leading to Orizava.

This hill overlooks the city of Vera Cruz. Below our position, and seeming almost within reach of the hand, lay the "City of the True Cross," rising out of the white plain, and outlined upon the blue back-ground of the sea.

The dark gray towers and painted domes; the Gothic turret and Moorish minaret, impressed us with the idea of the antique; while here and there the tamarind, nourished on some azotea, or the fringed fronds of the palm-tree, drooping over the notched parapet, lent to the city an aspect at once southern and picturesque.

Domes, spires and cupolas rose over the old gray walls, crowned with floating banners—the consular flags of France, and Spain, and Britain, waving alongside the eagle of the Aztecs.

Beyond, the blue waters of the Gulf rippled lightly against the sea-washed battlements of San Juan, whose brilliant lights glistened along the combing of the surf.

To the south we could distinguish the Isle of Sacrificios, and the dark hulls that slept silently under the shelter of its coral reef.

Outside the fortified wall, which girt the city with its cincture of gray rock, a smooth plain stretched rearward to the foot of the hill on which we stood; and right and left, along the crest of the ridge from Punta Hornos to Vergara, ranged a line of dark forms—the picket sentries of the American outposts as they stood knee-deep in the soft, yielding sand-drift.

It was a picture of surpassing interest; and, as we stood gazing upon it, the moon suddenly disappeared behind a bank of clouds; and the lamps of the city, heretofore eclipsed by

her brighter beam, now burned up and glistened along the walls.

Bells rung merrily from church-towers, and bugles sounded through the echoing streets. At intervals we could hear the shrill cries of the guard—"Centinela alerta!"—and the sharp challenge, "Quien viva?"

Then the sound of sweet music, mingled with the soft voices of women, was wafted to our ears: and with beating hearts we fancied we could hear the light tread of silken feet, as they brushed over the polished floor of the ball-room.

As we continued gazing, a bright jet of flame shot out horizontally from the parapet over Puerto Nuevo.

"Look out!" cried Twing, at the same instant flinging his wiry little carcass squat under the brow of a sand-wreath.

Several of the party followed his example; but, before all had housed themselves, a shot came singing past, along with the loud report of a twenty-four.

The shot struck the comb of the ridge, within several yards of the group, and ricocheted off into the distant hills.

"Try it again!" cried one.

"That fellow has lost a champagne supper!" said Twing.

"More likely he has had it, or his aim would be more steady," suggested an officer.

"Oysters, too—only think of it!" said Clayley.

"Howld your tongue, Clayley, or by my sowl I'll charge down upon the town!"

This came from Hennessy, upon whose imagination the contrast between champagne and oysters and the gritty pork and biscuit he had been feeding upon for several days past, acted like a shock.

"There again!" cried Twing, whose quick eye caught the blaze upon the parapet.

"A shell, by the powers!" exclaimed Hennessy. "Let it drop first, or it may drop on ye," he continued, as several officers were about to fling themselves on their faces.

The bomb shot up with a hissing, hurtling sound. A little spark could be seen, as it traced its graceful curves through the dark heavens.

The report echoed from the walls, and at the same instant was heard a dull sound, as the shell buried itself in the sand-drift.

It fell close to one of the picket sentinels, who was standing upon his post within a few paces of the group. The man appeared to be either asleep or stupefied, as he remained stock still. Perhaps he had mistaken it for the ricochet of a round shot.

"It's big shooting for them to hit the hill!" exclaimed a young officer.

The words were scarcely passed when a loud crash, like the bursting of a cannon, was heard under our feet; the ground opened like an earthquake; and amid the whistling of the fragments, the sand was dashed into our faces.

A cloud of dust hung for a moment above the spot. The moon at this instant reappeared; and, as the dust slowly settled away, the mutilated body of the soldier was seen upon the brow of the hill, at the distance of twenty paces from his post.

A low cheer reached us from Concepcion, the fort whence the shell had been projected.

Chagrined at the occurrence, and mortified that it had been caused by our imprudence, we were turning to leave the hill, when the "whish" of a rocket attracted our attention.

It rose from the chaparral about a quarter of a mile in the rear of the camp, and, before it had reached its culminating point, an answering signal shot up from the Puerto Nuevo.

At the same instant a horseman dashed out of the thicket and headed his horse at the steep sand-hills. After three or four desperate plunges the fiery mustang gained the crest of the ridge upon which lay the remains of the dead soldier.

Here the rider, seeing our party, suddenly reined up and balanced for a moment in the stirrup, as if uncertain whether to advance or retreat.

We, on the other hand, taking him for some officer of our own, and wondering who it could be galloping about at such an hour, stood silent and waiting.

"By heavens, that's a Mexican!" muttered Twing, as the ranchero dress became apparent under a brighter beam of the moon.

Before any one could reply, the strange horseman wheeled sharply to the left, and, drawing a pistol, fired it into our midst. Then spurring his wild horse, he galloped past us into a deep defile of the hills.

"You're a set of blamed Yankee fools!" he shouted back, as he reached the bottom of the dell.

Half a dozen shots replied to the taunting speech, but the retreating object was beyond pistol range before our astonished party had recovered from their surprise at such an act of daring audacity.

In a few minutes we could see both horse and rider near the walls of the city—a speck on the white plain—and shortly after we heard the grating hinges of the Puerto Nuevo, as the huge

gate swung open to receive him. No one was hit by the shot of his pistol. Several could be heard gritting their teeth with mortification as we commenced descending the hill.

"Did you know that voice, captain?" whispered Clayley to me as we returned to camp.

"Yes."

"You think it was—"

"Dubrosc."

CHAPTER VIII.

MAJOR BLOSSOM.

On reaching the camp I found a mounted orderly in front of my tent.

"From the general," said the soldier, touching his cap and handing me a sealed note.

The orderly, without waiting a reply, leaped into his saddle and rode off.

I broke the seal and read with delight:—

"SIR:—You will report, with fifty men, to Major Blossom, at 4 A. M. to-morrow."

"By order,"

"(Signed) A. A. A.-G."

"Captain Haller, Commanding Co., Rifle Rangers."

"Old Bloss, eh? Quartermaster scouting, I hope," said Clayley, looking over the contents of the note.

"Anything but the trenches; I am sick of them."

"Had it been anybody else but Blossom—fighting Daniels, for instance—we might have reckoned on a comfortable bit of duty; but the old whale can hardly climb into his saddle—it does look bad."

"I will not long remain in doubt. Order the sergeant to warn the men for four."

I walked through the camp in search of Blossom's marquee, which I found in a grove of caoutchouc-trees, and out of range of the heaviest metal in Vera Cruz. The major himself was seated in a large Campeachy chair, that had been "borrowed" from some neighboring rancho; and perhaps it was never so well filled as by its present occupant.

It would be useless to attempt an elaborate description of Major Blossom. That would require an entire chapter.

Perhaps the best that can be done to give the reader an idea of him is to say that he was a great, fat, red man, and known among his brother officers as "the swearing major." If any one in the army loved good living, it was Major Blossom; and if any one hated hard living, that man was Major George Blossom.

As I entered the tent he was seated at supper. The viands before him were in striking contrast to the food upon which the army was then subsisting. There was no gravel gritting between the major's teeth as he masticated mess-pork or moldy biscuit. He found no debris of sand and small rocks at the bottom of his coffee-cup. No; quite the contrary.

A dish of pickled salmon, a side of cold turkey, a plate of sliced tongue, with a fine Virginia ham, were the striking features of the major's supper, while a handsome French coffee-urn, containing the essence of Mocha, simmered upon the table. Out of this the major, from time to time, replenished his silver cup. A bottle of eau-de-vie, that stood near his right hand, assisted him likewise in swallowing his ample ration.

"Major Blossom, I presume?" said I.

"My name," ejaculated the major, between two swallows, so short and quick that the phrase sounded like a monosyllable.

"I have received orders to report to you, sir."

"Ah! bad business! bad business!" exclaimed the major, qualifying the words with an energetic oath.

"How, sir?"

"Atrocious business! dangerous service! Can't see why they sent me."

"I came, major, to inquire the nature of the service, so that I may have my men in order for it."

"D—d dangerous service!"

"It is?"

"Infernal cut-throats! Thousands of 'em in the bushes—bore a man through as soon as wink. Those yellow devils are worse than—" and again the swearing major wound up with an exclamation not proper to be repeated.

"Can't see why they picked me out. There's Myers, and Wayne, and Wood, not half my size, and that thin scare-the-crows, Allen; but no—the general wants me killed. Die soon enough in this infernal nest of centipedes without being shot in the chaparral! I wish the chaparral was—" and again the major's unmentionable words came pouring forth in a volley.

I saw that it was useless to interrupt him until the first burst was over. From his frequent anathemas on the "bushes" and the "chaparral," I could gather that the service I was called upon to perform lay at some distance from the camp; but beyond this I could learn nothing, until the major had sworn himself into a degree of composure, which after some minutes he accomplished. I then re-stated the object of my visit.

"We're going into the country for mules," replied the major. "Mules, indeed! Heaven knows there isn't a mule within ten miles, un-

less with a yellow-hided Mexican on his back; and such mules we don't want. The volunteers—curse them!—have scared everything to the mountains; not a stick of celery nor an onion to be had at any price."

"How long do you think we may be gone?" I inquired.

"Long? Only a day. If I stay over night in the chaparral, may a wolf eat me! Oh, no; if the mules don't turn up soon, somebody else may go fetch 'em—that's all."

"I may ration them for one day?" said I.

"Two—two; you fellows 'll be hungry. Roberts, of the Rifles, who's been out in the country, tells me there isn't enough forage to feed a cat. So you'd better take two days' biscuit; I suppose we'll meet with beef enough on the hoof; though I'd rather have a rump-steak out of the Philadelphia market than all the beef in Mexico. Hang their beef! it's as tough as tan leather!"

"At four o'clock, then, major, I'll be with you," said I, preparing to take my leave.

"Make it a little later, captain; I get no sleep with these cursed gallynippers and things; but stay—how many men have you got?"

"In my company eighty; but my order is to take only fifty."

"There again! I told you so; want me killed—they want old Bloss killed. Fifty men, when a thousand of the leather-skinned devils have been seen not ten miles off! Fifty men! Great heavens! fifty men! There's an escort to take the chaparral with!"

"But they are fifty men worth a hundred, I promise you."

"And if they were worth five hundred, it wouldn't be enough; I tell you the chaparral's full—full as Hades! (a certain place of torment familiar to the major's lips)."

"We shall have to proceed with more caution," I rejoined.

"Caution be hanged!" and caution was summarily sentenced to the same regions. Bring all—every son of a gun—bugler and all."

"But that, major, would be contrary to the general's orders."

"Hang the general's orders! Obey some general's orders in this army, and you would do queer things. Bring them all; take my advice. I tell you, if you don't, our lives may answer for it. Fifty men!"

I was about to depart when the major stopped me with a loud "Hilloa!"

"Why," cried he, "I have lost my senses. Your pardon, captain! This unlucky thing has driven me crazy. They must pick upon me! What will you drink? Here's some good brandy—infernal good; sorry I can't say as much for the water."

I mixed a glass of brandy and water; the major did the same, and having pledged each other, we bade "good-night," and separated.

CHAPTER IX.

SCOUTING IN THE CHAPARRAL.

BEFORE daybreak of the morning after my interview with the "swearing major," a head appeared between the flaps of my tent. It was that of Sergeant Bob Lincoln.

"The men air under arms, cap'n."

"Very well," cried I, leaping from my bed, and hastily buckling on my accouterments.

I looked forth. The moon was still brightly shining, and I could see a number of uniformed men standing upon the company parade, in double rank. Directly in front of my tent a small boy was saddling a very small horse. The boy was "Little Jack," as the soldiers called him, and the horse was little Jack's mustang, "Twidget."

Jack wore a tight-fitting green jacket, trimmed with yellow lace, and buttoned up to the throat; pantaloons of light green, straight-cut and striped along the seams; a forage-cap set jauntily upon a profusion of bright curls; a saber with a blade of eighteen inches, and a pair of clinking Mexican spurs. Besides these, he carried the smallest of all rifles. Thus armed and accoutered, he presented the appearance of a miniature "Ranger."

Twidget had his peculiarities. He was a tight, wiry little animal, that could live upon mezquite beans or maguey leaves for an indefinite time; and his abstemiousness was often put to the test. Afterward, upon an occasion during the battles in the valley of Mexico, Jack and Twidget had somehow got separated, at which time the mustang had been shut up for four days in the cellar of a ruined convent, with no other food than stones and mortar! How Twidget came by his name is not clear. Perhaps it was some waif of the rider's own fancy.

As I appeared at the entrance of my tent, Jack had just finished strapping on his Mexican saddle, and, seeing me, up he ran to assist in serving my breakfast. This was hastily dispatched, and our party took the route in silence through the sleeping camp. Shortly after, we were joined by the major, mounted on a tall, raw-boned horse; while a darky, whom the major addressed as "Doc," rode a snug, stout cob, and carried a basket. This last contained the major's commissariat.

We were soon traveling along the Orizava road, the major and Jack riding in the advance,

I could not help smiling at the contrast between these two equestrians; the former with his great gaunt horse, looming up in the uncertain light of the morning like some huge centaur; while Jack and Twidget appeared the two representatives of the kingdom of Lilliput.

On turning an angle of the forest, a horseman appeared at some distance along the road. The major gradually slackened his pace until he was square with the head of the column, and then fell back into the rear. This maneuver was executed in the most natural manner, but I could plainly see that the mounted Mexican had caused the major no small degree of alarm.

The horseman proved to be a zambo in pursuit of cattle that had escaped from a neighboring corral. I put some inquiries to him in relation to the object of our expedition. The zambo pointed to the south, saying in Spanish that mules were plenty in that direction.

Following his direction, we struck into the new path, which soon narrowed into a bridle-road or trail. The road darkened, passing under thick-leaved trees, that met and twined over our heads.

At times the hanging limbs and joined parasites caused the major to flatten his huge body upon the horn of the saddle, and once or twice he was obliged to alight and walk under the impeding branches of the thorny acacias.

Our journey continued without noise, silence being interrupted only by an occasional oath from the major—uttered, however, in a low tone, as we were now fairly "in the woods." The road at length opened upon a small prairie or glade, near the borders of which rose a "butte," covered with chaparral.

Leaving the party in ambuscade below, I ascended the butte, to obtain a view of the surrounding country. The day had now fairly broken, and the sun was just rising over the blue waters of the Gulf.

To the south and west stretched a wide expanse of champaign country, glowing in all the brilliancy of tropical vegetation.

A broad belt of forest, dotted with the life-like frondage of the palm, swept up to the foot of the hill. Beyond this lay an open tract of meadow, or prairie, upon which were browsing thousands of cattle.

The meadow, then, was the point to be reached.

The belt of forest already mentioned must be crossed; and to effect this I struck into a trail that seemed to lead in the direction of the meadow.

The trail became lighter as we entered the heavy timber. Some distance further on we reached a stream. Here the trail entirely disappeared. No signs could be found on the opposite bank. The underwood was thick; and vines, with broad green leaves and huge clusters of scarlet flowers barred up the path like a wall.

It was strange! The path had evidently led to this point, but where beyond?

Several men were detached across the stream to find an opening. After a search of several minutes a short exclamation from Lincoln proclaimed success. I crossed over, and found the hunter standing near the bank, holding back a screen of boughs and vine-leaves, beyond which a narrow but plain track was easily distinguished, leading on into the forest. The trellis closed like a gate, and it seemed as if art had lent a hand to the concealment of the track. The foot-prints of several horses were plainly visible in the sandy bottom of the road.

The men entered in single file. With some difficulty Major Blossom and his great horse squeezed themselves through, and we moved along under the shady and silent woods.

After a march of several miles, fording numerous streams, and working our way through tangled thickets of nopal and wild maguey, an opening suddenly appeared through the trees. Emerging from the forest, and a brilliant scene burst upon us. A large clearing, evidently once cultivated, but now in a state of neglect, stretched out before us. Broad fields, covered with flowers of every hue—thickets of blooming rose-trees—belts of the yellow helianthus—and groups of cocoa-trees and half-wild plantains, formed a picture singular and beautiful.

On one side, and close to the border of the forest, could be seen the roof of a house, peering above groves of glistening foliage, and thither we marched.

We entered a lane, with its *guarda-rayas* of orange-trees planted in rows upon each side, and meeting overhead.

The sunlight fell through this leafy screen with a mellow and delicious softness, and the perfume of flowers was wafted on the air.

The rich music of birds was around us; and the loveliness of the scene was heightened by the wild neglect which characterized it.

On approaching the house we halted; and after charging the men to remain silent, I advanced alone to reconnoiter.

CHAPTER X.

ADVENTURE WITH A CAYMAN.

THE lane suddenly opened upon a pasture, but within this a thick hedge of jessamines, forming a circle, barred the view.

In this circle was the house, whose roof only could be seen from without.

Not finding any opening through the jessamines, I parted the leaves with my hands, and looked through. The picture was dream-like; so strange, I could scarcely credit my senses.

On the crest of the little hillock stood a house of rare construction—unique and unlike anything I had ever seen. The sides were formed of bamboos, closely picketed, and laced together by fibers of the *pita*. The roof—a thatch of palm-leaves—projected far over the wooden cupola with a cross. There were no windows. The walls themselves were translucent; and articles of furniture could be distinguished through the interstices of the bamboos.

A curtain of green barege, supported by a rod and rings, formed the door. This was drawn, discovering an ottoman near the entrance, and an elegant harp.

The whole structure presented the *coup-d'œil* of a huge bird-cage, with its wires of gold!

The grounds were in keeping with the house. In these, the evidence of neglect, which had been noticed without, existed no longer. Every object appeared to be under the training of a watchful solicitude.

A thick grove of olives, with their gnarled and spreading branches and dark green leaves, stretched rearward, forming a background to the picture. Right and left grew clumps of orange and lime trees. Golden fruit and flowers of brilliant hues mingled with their yellow leaves; spring and autumn blended upon the same branches!

Rare shrubs—exotics—grew out of large vessels of jappaned earthenware, whose brilliant tints added to the voluptuous coloring of the scene.

A *jet-d'eau*, crystalline, rose to the height of twenty feet, and, returning in a shower of prismatic globules stole away through a bed of water-lilies and other aquatic plants, losing itself in a grove of lofty plantain-trees. These, growing from the cool, watery bed, flung out their broad glistening leaves to the length of twenty feet.

No signs of human life met the eye. The birds alone seemed to revel in the luxuriance of this tropical paradise. A brace of pea-fowl stalked over the parterre in all the pride of their rainbow plumage. In the fountain appeared the tall form of a flamingo, his scarlet color contrasting with the green leaves of the water-lily. Songsters were trilling in every tree. The mock-bird, perched upon the highest limb, was mimicking the monotonous tones of the parrot. The toucans and trogons flashed from grove to grove, or balanced their bodies under the spray of the *jet-d'eau*; while the humming-birds hung upon the leaves of some honeyed blossom, or prinked over the parterre like straying sunbeams.

I was running my eye over this dream-like picture, in search of a human figure, when the soft, metallic accents of a female voice reached me from the grove of plantains. It was a burst of laughter—clear and ringing. Then followed another, with short exclamations, and the sound of water, as if dashed and sprinkled with a light hand.

My first impulse was "forward!" which I obeyed.

I stooped down and silently parted the broad silken leaves of the plantains. The sight was divine!

Within lay a circular tank, or basin, of crystal water, several rods in diameter, and walled in on all sides by the high screen of glossy plantains, whose giant leaves, stretching out horizontally, sheltered it from the rays of the sun.

A low parapet of mason-work ran around, forming the circumference of the circle. This was jappaned with a species of porcelain, whose deep coloring of blue, and green, and yellow, was displayed in a variety of grotesque figures.

A strong jet boiled up in the center, by the refraction of whose ripples the gold and red fish seemed multiplied into myriads.

At a distant point a bed of water-lilies hung out from the parapet; and the long, thin neck of a swan rose gracefully over the leaves. Another, his mate, stood upon the bank, drying her snowy pinions in the sun.

A different object attracted me, depriving me for a while of the power of action.

In the water and near the jet, were two beautiful girls, clothed in a sort of sleeveless green tunic, loosely girdled. They were immersed to the waist. So pellucid was the water that their little feet were distinctly visible at the bottom, shining like gold.

"Sisters!" one would exclaim, and yet their complexions were strikingly dissimilar. The blood, mantling darker in the veins of one, lent an olive tinge to the soft and wax-like surface of her skin, while the red upon her cheeks and lips presented an admixture of purple. Her hair, too, was black; and a dark shading along the upper lip—a mustache, in fact—soft and silken as the tracery of a crayon, contrasted with the dazzling whiteness of her teeth. Her eyes were black, large, and almond-shaped—with that expression which looks over one; and her whole appearance formed a type of that

beauty which we associate with the Abencerage and the Alhambra. This was evidently the elder.

The other was the type of a distinct class of beauty—the golden-haired blonde. Her eyes were large, globular, and blue as turquoise. Her hair of a chastened yellow, long and luxuriant; while her skin, less soft and waxen than that of her sister, presented an effusion of roseate blushes that extended along the snowy whiteness of her arms. These, in the sun, appeared as bloodless and transparent as the tiny gold-fish that quivered in her uplifted hand.

I was riveted to the spot. My first impulse was to retire, silently and modestly, but the power of a strange fascination for a moment prevented me. Was it a dream?

"Ah! what a barbarian you are! poor little thing!"

"We shall eat it."

"Goodness! no! fling it in, Luz, or I shall throw water in your eyes." And the speaker stooped as if to execute the threat.

"Now I shall not," said Luz, resolutely.

"Look out, then!"

The brunette placed her little hands close together, forming with their united palms a concave surface, and commenced dashing water upon the perverse blonde.

The latter instantly dropped the gold fish and retaliated.

An exciting and animated contest ensued. The bright globules flew around their heads and rolled down their glistening tresses, as from the pinions of a swan, while their clear laughter rung out at intervals, as one or the other appeared victorious.

A hoarse voice drew my attention from this interesting spectacle. Looking whence it came, my eye rested upon a huge negress stretched under a cocoa-tree, who had raised herself on one arm, and was laughing at the contest.

Becoming sensible of my intrusive position, I turned to retreat, when a shrill cry reached me from the pond.

The swans, with a frightened energy, shrieked and flapped over the surface—the gold-fish shot to and fro like sunbeams, and leaped out of the water, quivering and terrified—and the birds on all sides screamed and chattered.

I sprang forward to ascertain the cause of this strange commotion. My eye fell upon the negress, who had risen, and, running out upon the parapet with uplifted arms, shouted, in terrific accents:

"*El cayman! el cayman!*"

I looked across to the other side of the pond. A fearful object met my eyes—the cayman of Mexico! The hideous monster was slowly crawling over the low wall, dragging his lengthened body from a bed of aquatic plants.

Already his short fore-arms, squamy and corrugated, rested upon the inner edge of the parapet, his shoulders projecting as if in the act to spring! His scale-covered back, with its long serrated ridge, glittered with a slippery moistness, and his eyes, usually dull, gleamed fierce and lurid from their prominent sockets.

I had brought with me a light rifle. It was but the work of a moment to unsling and level it. The sharp crack followed, and the ball impinged between the monster's eyes, glancing harmlessly from his hard skull, as though it had been a plate of steel. The shot was an idle one—perhaps worse; for, stung to madness with the stunning shock, the reptile sprang far out into the water, and made directly for his victims.

The girls, who had long since given over their mirthful contest, seemed to have lost all presence of mind; and instead of making for the bank, stood locked in each other's arms, terrified and trembling.

With a spring I cleared the parapet, and drawing my sword, dashed madly across the basin.

The girls were near the center; but the cayman had got the start of me, and the water, three feet deep, impeded my progress. The bottom of the tank, too, was slippery, and I fell once or twice on my hands. I rose again, and with frantic energy plunged forward, all the while calling upon the bathers to make for the parapet.

Notwithstanding my shouts, the terrified girls made no effort to save themselves. They were incapable from terror.

On came the cayman with the velocity of vengeance. It was a fearful moment. Already he swam at the distance of less than six paces from his prey, his long snout projecting from the water, his gaunt jaws displaying their quadruple rows of sharp glistening teeth.

I shouted despairingly. I was baffled by the deep water. I had nearly twice the distance before I could interpose myself between the monster and his victims.

"I shall be too late!"

Suddenly I saw that the cayman had swerved. In his eagerness he had struck a subaqueous pipe of the jet.

It delayed him only a moment; but in that moment I had passed the statue-like group, and stood ready to receive his attack.

"*A la orilla! a la orilla!*" (to the bank! to the bank!) I shouted, pushing the terrified girls

with one hand, while with the other I held my sword at arm's length in the face of the advancing reptile.

The girls now, for the first time awaking from their lethargy of terror, rushed toward the bank.

On came the monster, gnashing his teeth in the fury of disappointment, and uttering fearful cries.

As soon as he had got within reach I aimed a blow at his head; but the light saber glinted from the fleshless skull with the ringing of steel to steel.

The blow, however, turned him out of his course, and missing his aim, he passed me like an arrow. I looked around with a feeling of despair. "Thank heaven! they are safe!"

I felt the clammy scales rub against my thigh; and I leaped aside to avoid the stroke of his tail, as it lashed the water in a foam.

Again the monster turned, and came on as before.

This time I did not attempt to cut, but thrust the saber directly for his throat. The cold blade snapped between his teeth like an icicle. Not above twelve inches remained with the hilt; and with this I hacked and fought with the energy of despair.

My situation had now grown critical indeed. The girls had reached the bank, and stood screaming upon the parapet.

At length the elder seized upon a pole, and, lifting it with all her might, leaped back into the basin, and was hastening to my rescue when a stream of fire was poured through the leaves of the plantains. I heard a sharp crack—the short humming whizz of a bullet—and a large form, followed by half a dozen others, emerged from the grove, and, rushing over the wall, plunged into the pond.

I heard a loud plashing in the water, the shouts of men, the clashing of bayonets; and then saw the reptile roll over, pierced by a dozen wounds.

CHAPTER XI.

DON COSME ROSALES.

"Y'ur safe, cap'n!" It was Lincoln's voice. Around me stood a dozen of the men, up to their waists. Little Jack, too, his head and forage-cap just appearing above the surface of the water, stood with his eighteen inches of steel buried in the carcass of the dead reptile. I could not help smiling at the ludicrous picture.

"Yes, safe," answered I, panting for breath; "safe—you came in good time, though."

"We heern y'ur shot, cap'n," said Lincoln, "an' we guessed yur didn't shoot without a somethin' ter shoot for; so I tuk half a dozen files and kim up."

"You acted right, sergeant; but where—"

I was looking toward the edge of the tank where I had last seen the girls. They had disappeared.

"If yez mane the faymales," answered Chane, "they're *vamosed* through the threes. Be Saint Patrick! the black one's a thrump anyhow! She looks for all the world like them bewtiful Crayoles of Dimmerary."

Saying this, he turned suddenly round, and commenced driving his bayonet furiously into the dead cayman, exclaiming between his thrusts:

"Och, ye divil! Bad luck to yer ugly carcass! You're a nate-looking baste to interfere with a pair of illigant craythers! Be the crass! he's all shill, boys. Och, mother o' Moses! I can't find a saft spot in him!"

We climbed out upon the parapet, and the soldiers commenced wiping their wet guns.

Clayley appeared at this moment, filing round the pond at the head of the detachment. As I explained the adventure to the lieutenant, he laughed heartily.

"By Jove! it will never do for a dispatch," said he; "one killed on the side of the enemy, and on ours not a wound. There is one, however, who may be reported 'badly scared.'"

"Who?" I asked.

"Why, who but the bold Blossom?"

"But where is he?"

"Heaven only knows! The last I saw of him, he was screening himself behind an old ruin. I wouldn't think it strange if he was off to camp—that is, if he believes he can find his way back again."

As Clayley said this, he burst into a loud yell of laughter.

It was with difficulty I could restrain myself, for, looking in the direction indicated by the lieutenant, I saw a bright object, which I at once recognized as the major's face.

He had drawn aside the broad plantain-leaves, and was peering cautiously through, with a look of the most ludicrous terror. His face only was visible, round and luminous, like the full moon—and like her, too, variegated with light and shade; for fear had produced spots of white and purple over the surface of his capacious cheeks.

As soon as the major saw how the "land lay," he came blowing and blustering through the bushes like an elephant, and it now became apparent that he carried his long saber drawn and flourishing.

"Bad luck, after all!" said he, as he marched round the pond with a bold stride. "That's all—is it?" he continued, pointing to the dead cayman. "Bah! I was in hopes we'd have a brush with the yellow skins."

"No, major," said I, trying to look serious; "we are not so fortunate."

"I have no doubt, however," said Clayley, with a malicious wink, "but that we'll have them here in a squirrel's jump. They must have heard the report of our guns."

A complete change became visible in the major's bearing. The point of his saber dropped slowly to the ground, and the blue and white spots began to array themselves afresh on his great red cheeks.

"Don't you think, captain," said he, "we've gone far enough into the cursed country? There's no mules in it—I can certify there's not—not a single mule. Had we not better return to camp?"

Before I could reply, an object appeared that drew our attention, and lightened the mosaic upon the major's cheeks.

A man, strangely attired, was seen running down the slope toward the spot where we were standing.

"Guerrillas, by Jove!" exclaimed Clayley, in a voice of feigned terror; and he pointed to the scarlet sash which was twisted round the man's waist.

The major looked round for some object where he might shelter himself in case of a skirmish. He was sidling behind a high point of the parapet when the stranger rushed forward, and, throwing both arms about his neck, poured forth a perfect cataract of Spanish, in which the word *gracias* was of frequent occurrence.

"What does the man mean with his *grashes*?" exclaimed the major, struggling to free himself from the Mexican.

But the latter did not hear him, for his eye at that moment rested upon my dripping habiliments; and, dropping the major, he transferred his embrace and *gracias* to me.

"Senor capitan," he said, still speaking in Spanish, and hugging me like a bear, "accept my thanks. Ah, sir! you have saved my children; how can I show you my gratitude?"

Here followed a multitude of those complimentary expressions peculiar to the language of Cervantes, which ended by his offering me his house and all it contained.

I bowed in acknowledgment of his courtesy, apologizing for being so ill-prepared to receive his "hug," as I observed that my saturated vestments had wet the old fellow to the skin.

I had now time to examine the stranger, who was a tall, thin, sallow old gentleman, with a face at once Spanish and intelligent. His hair was white and short, while a mustache, somewhat grizzled, shaded his lips. Jet-black brows projected over a pair of keen and sparkling eyes. His dress was a roundabout of the finest white linen, with vest and pantaloons of the same material—the latter fastened round the waist by a scarf of bright red silk. Shoes of green morocco covered his small feet, while a broad Guayaquil hat shaded his face from the sun.

Though his costume was transatlantic—speaking in reference to Old Spain—there was that in his air and manner that bespoke him a true *hidalgo*.

After a moment's observation I proceeded, in my best Spanish, to express my regret for the fright which the young ladies—his daughters, I presumed—had suffered.

The Mexican looked at me with a slight appearance of surprise.

"Why, senor capitan," said he, "your accent—you are a foreigner!"

"A foreigner! To Mexico, did you mean?"

"Yes, senor. Is it not so?"

"Oh! of course," answered I, smiling, and somewhat puzzled in turn.

"And how long have you been in the army, senor capitan?"

"But a short time."

"How do you like Mexico, senor?"

"I have seen but little of it as yet."

"Why, how long have you been in the country, then?"

"Three days," answered I; "we landed on the 9th."

"*Por Dios!* three days, and in our army already!" muttered the Spaniard, throwing up his eyes in unaffected surprise.

I began to think I was interrogated by a lunatic.

"May I ask what countryman you are?" continued the old gentleman.

"What countryman? An American, of course."

"An American?"

"*Un Americano*," repeated I; for we were conversing in Spanish.

"*Y son esos Americanos?*" (and are these Americans?) quickly demanded my new acquaintance.

"Si, senor," replied I.

"*Carrambo!*" shouted the Spaniard, with a sudden leap, his eyes almost starting from their sockets.

"I should say, not exactly Americans," I added. "Many of them are Irish, and French,

and Germans, and Swedes, and Swiss; yet they are all Americans now."

But the Mexican did not stay to hear my explanation. After recovering from the first shock of surprise, he had bounded through the grove; and with a wave of his hand, and the ejaculation "*Esperate!*" disappeared among the plantains. The men, who had gathered around the lower end of the basin, burst out into a roar of laughter, which I did not attempt to repress. The look of terrified astonishment of the old Don had been too much for my own gravity; and I could not help being amused at the conversation that ensued among the soldiers. They were at some distance, yet I could overhear their remarks.

"That Mexikin's an unhospitable cuss!" muttered Lincoln, with an expression of contempt.

"He might av axed the captain to drink, after sayin' such a pair of illigant craythers," said Chane.

"Sorra durap's in the house, Murt; the place looks dry," remarked another son of the Green Isle.

"Och! an' it's a beautiful cage, anyhow," returned Chane, "and beautiful birds in it, too. It puts me in mind of ould Dimmerary; but there we had the liquor, the raal rum—oshins of it, alanna!"

"That 'ere chap's a greelye, I strongly spect," whispered one, a regular down-east Yankee.

"A what?" asked his companion.

"Why, a greelye—one o' them 'ere Mexikin robbers."

"Arrah, now! did yez see the red sash?" inquired an Irishman.

"Thim's capt'in's," suggested the Yankee.

"He's a capt'in or a kurnel; I'll bet high on that."

"What did he say, Nath, as he was running off?"

"I don't know 'zactly—somethin' that sounded mighty like 'spearin' on us."

"He's a lanzeer then, by jingo!"

"He had better try on his spearin'," said another; "there's shootin' before spearin'—mighty good ground, too, behind this hyur painted wall."

"The old fellow was mighty fri'ndly at first; what got into him, anyhow?"

"Raoul says he offered to give the captain his house and all the furnishin's."

"Och, mother o' Moses! and thim illigant girls, too?"

"Ov coorse."

"By my sowl! an' if I was the capt'in, I'd take him at his word and l'ave off fightin' intirely."

"It is delf," said a soldier, referring to the material of which the parapet was constructed.

"No, it ain't."

"It's chaney, then."

"No, nor chaney either."

"Well, what is it?"

"It's only a stone wall painted, you green-horn!"

"Stone thunder! it's solid delf, I say."

"Try it with your bayonet, Jim."

"*Crick—crick—crick—crinell!*" reached my ears. Turning round, I saw that one of the men had commenced breaking off the japped work of the parapet with his bayonet.

"Stop that!" I shouted to the man.

The remark of Chane that followed, although uttered *sotto voce*, I could distinctly hear. It was sufficiently amusing.

"The captain don't want yez to destroy what'll be his own some day, when he marries one of thim young Dons. Here comes the owld one; and, by the powers! he's got a big paper; he's goin' to make over the property!"

Laughing, I looked round, and saw that the Don was returning, sure enough. He hurried up, holding out a large sheet of parchment.

"Well, senor, what's this?" I inquired.

"*No soy Mexicano—soy Espanol!*" (I am no Mexican—I am a Spaniard,) said he, with the expression of a true *hidalgo*.

Casting my eye carelessly over the document, I perceived that it was a *safeguard* from the Spanish consul at Vera Cruz, certifying that the bearer, Don Cosme Rosales, was a native of Spain.

"Senor Rosales," said I, returning the paper, "this is not necessary. The interesting circumstances under which we have met should have secured you good treatment, even were you a Mexican and we the barbarians we have been represented. We have come to make war, not with peaceful citizens, but with a rabble soldiery."

"*Es verdad.* You are wet, senor! you are hungry?"

I could not deny that I was both the one and the other.

"You need refreshment, gentlemen; will you come to my house?"

"Permit me, senor, to introduce to you Major Blossom—Lieutenant Clayley—Lieutenant Oakes: Don Cosme Rosales, gentlemen."

My friends and the Don bowed to each other. The major had now recovered his complacency.

"*Vamonos caballeros!*" (come on, gentlemen) said the Don, starting toward the house.

"But your soldiers, capitan?" added he, stopping suddenly.

"They will remain here," I rejoined.

"Permit me to send them some dinner."

"Oh! certainly," replied I, "use your own pleasure, Don Cosme; but do not put your household to any inconvenience."

In a few minutes we found our way to the house, which was neither more nor less than the cage looking structure already described.

CHAPTER XII.

A MEXICAN DINNER.

"*Pasan adentro, senores*," said Don Cosme, drawing aside the curtain of the rancho, and beckoning us to enter.

"Ha!" exclaimed the major, struck with the *coup-d'œil* of the interior.

"Be seated, gentlemen. *Ya vuelvo*." (I will return in an instant.)

So saying, Don Cosme disappeared into a little porch in the back, partially screened from observation by a close net-work of woven cane.

"Very pretty, by Jove!" said Clayley, in a low voice.

"Pretty indeed!" echoed the major, with one of his customary asseverations.

"Stylish! one ought rather to say, to do it justice."

"Stylish!" again chimed in the major, repeating his formula.

"Rosewood chairs and tables," continued Clayley; "a harp, guitar, piano, sofas, ottomans, carpets knee deep—whew!"

Not thinking of the furniture, I looked around the room, strangely bewildered.

"Ha! ha! what perplexes you, captain?" asked Clayley.

"Nothing."

"Ah! the girls you spoke of—the nymphs of the pond; but where the deuce are they?"

"Ah! where?" I asked, with a strange sense of uneasiness.

"Girls! what girls?" inquired the major, who had not yet learned the exact nature of our aquatic adventure.

Here the voice of Don Cosme was heard calling out—

"Pepe! Ramon! Francisco! bring dinner. *Anda! anda!*" (Be quick!)

"Who on earth is the old fellow calling?" asked the major, with some concern in his manner.

"I see no one."

Nor could we; so we all rose up together, and approached that side of the building that looked rearward.

The house, to all appearance, had but one apartment—the room in which we then were. The only point of this screened from observation was the little veranda into which Don Cosme had entered; but this was not large enough to contain the number of persons who might be represented by the names he had called out.

Two smaller buildings stood under the olive-trees in the rear; but these, like the house, were transparent, and not a human figure appeared within them. We could see through the trunks of the olives a clear distance of a hundred yards. Beyond this, the mezquite and the scarlet leaves of the wild maguey marked the boundary of the forest.

"It was equally puzzling to us whither the girl had gone, or whence 'Pepe, Raymon and Francisco' were to come."

The tinkling of a little bell startled us from our conjectures, and the voice of Don Cosme was heard inquiring:

"Have you any favorite dish, gentlemen?"

Some one answered, "No."

"Curse me!" exclaimed the major, "I believe he can get anything we may call for—raise it out of the ground by stamping his foot or ringing a bell!—Didn't I tell you?"

This exclamation was uttered in consequence of the appearance of a train of well-dressed servants, five or six in number, bringing waiters with dishes and decanters. They entered from the porch; but how did they get into it? Certainly not from the woods without, else we should have seen them as they approached the cage.

The major uttered a terrible invocation, adding in a hoarse whisper, "This must be the Mexican Aladdin!"

I confess I was not less puzzled than he. Meanwhile the servants came and went, going empty and returning loaded. In less than half an hour the table fairly creaked under the weight of a sumptuous dinner. This is no figure of speech. There were dishes of massive silver, with huge flagons of the same metal, and even cups of gold!

"*Senores, vamos a comer*" (come, let us eat, gentlemen), said Don Cosme, politely motioning us to be seated. "I fear that you will not be pleased with my *cuisine*—it is purely Mexican—*estilo del pais*."

To say that the dinner was not a good one would be to utter a falsehood and contradict the statement of Major George Blossom, of the U. S. quartermaster's department, who afterward declared that it was the best dinner he had ever eaten in his life.

The dinner-dishes were at length removed, and dessert followed: cakes and creams, and jellies of various kinds, and blanc-mange, and a profusion of the most luxurious fruits. The golden orange, the ripe pine, the pale green lime, the juicy grape, the custard-like cherimolla, the zapote, the granadilla, the pitahaya, the tuna, the mamay; with dates, figs, almonds, plantains, bananas, and a dozen other species of fruits, piled upon salvers of silver, were set before us: in fact, every product of the tropical clime that could excite a new nerve of the sense of taste. We were fairly astonished at the profusion of luxuries that came from no one knew where.

"Come, gentlemen, try a glass of Curacao. Senor coronel, allow me the pleasure."

"Sir, your very good health."

"Senor coronel, would you prefer a glass of Majorca?"

"Thank you."

"Or perhaps you would choose *Pedro Ximenes*. I have some very old *Pedro Ximenes*."

"Either, my dear Don Cosme; either."

"Bring both, Ramon; and bring a couple of bottles of the Madeira—*sello verde* (green seal)."

"As I'm a Christian, the old gentleman's a conjuror!" muttered the major, now in the best humor possible.

"I wish he would conjure up something else than his infernal wine-bottles," thought I, becoming impatient at the non-appearance of the ladies.

"*Cafe, senores?*" A servant entered.

Coffee was handed round in cups of Sevres china.

"You smoke, gentlemen? Would you prefer a Havana? Here are some sent me from Cuba by a friend. I believe they are good; or, if you would amuse yourself with a cigarrito, here are *Campecheanos*. These are the country cigars—*puros*, as we call them. I would not recommend them."

"A Havana for me," said the major, helping himself at the same time to a fine-looking "regalia."

I had fallen into a somewhat painful reverie. I began to fear that, with all his hospitality, the Mexican would allow us to depart without an introduction to his family; and I had conceived a strong desire to speak with the two lovely beings whom I had already seen, but more particularly with the brunette, whose looks and actions had deeply impressed me. So strange is the mystery of love! My heart had already made its choice.

I was suddenly aroused by the voice of Don Cosme, who had risen, and was inviting myself and comrades to join the ladies in the drawing-room.

I started up so suddenly as almost to overturn one of the tables.

"Why, captain, what's the matter?" said Clayley. "Don Cosme is about to introduce us to the ladies. You're not going to back out?"

"Certainly not," stammered I.

"He says they're in the drawing-room," whispered the major, in a voice that betokened a degree of suspicion; "but where the plague that is, heaven only knows. Stand by, my boys! Are your pistols all right?"

"Pshaw, major! for shame!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A SUBTERRANEAN DRAWING-ROOM.

THE mystery of the drawing-room, and the servants, and the dishes, was soon over. A descending stairway explained the enigma.

"Let me conduct you to my cave, gentlemen," said the Spaniard; "I am half a subterranean."

In the hot weather, and during the northers, we find it more agreeable to live under the ground. Follow me, senores."

We descended, with the exception of Oakes, who returned to look after the men.

At the foot of the staircase we entered a hall brilliantly lighted. The floor was without a carpet, and exhibited a mosaic of the finest marble. The walls were painted of a pale blue color, and embellished by a series of pictures from the pencil of Murillo. These were framed in a costly and elegant manner. From the ceiling were suspended chandeliers of a curious and unique construction, holding in their outstretched branches wax candles of an ivory whiteness.

Large vases of waxen flowers, covered with crystals, stood around the hall upon tables of polished marble. Other articles of furniture, candelabra, girandoles, gilded clocks, filled the outline. Broad mirrors reflected the different objects; so that, instead of one apartment, this hall appeared only one of a continuous suite of splendid drawing-rooms.

And yet, upon closer observation, there seemed to be no door leading from this hall, which, as Don Cosme informed his guests, was the *ante-sala*.

Our host approached one of the large mirrors and slightly touched a spring. The tinkling of a small bell was heard within, and at the same instant the mirror glided back, reflecting in its motion a series of brilliant objects, that for a

moment bewildered our eyes with a blazing light.

"*Pasan adentro, senores*," said Don Cosme, stepping aside and waving us to enter.

We walked into the drawing-room. The magnificence that greeted us seemed a vision—a glorious and dazzling hallucination—more like the gilded brilliance of some enchanted palace than the interior of a Mexican gentleman's habitation.

As we stood gazing with irresistible wonderment, Don Cosme opened a side door and called out:

"*Ninas, ninas, ven aca!*" (Children, come hither!)

Presently we heard several female voices, blending together like a medley of singing-birds.

They approached. We heard the rustling of silken dresses, the falling of light feet in the doorway, and three ladies entered—the senora of Don Cosme, followed by her two beautiful daughters, the heroines of our aquatic adventure.

These hesitated a moment, scanning our faces; then, with a cry of "*Nuestro salvador!*" both rushed forward, and knelt, or rather crouched, at my feet, each of them clasping one of my hands, and covering it with kisses.

Meanwhile Don Cosme had introduced Clayley and the major to his senora, whose baptismal name was Joaquina; and taking the young ladies, one in each hand, he presented them as his daughters, Guadalupe and Maria de la Luz (Mary of the Light).

"Mamma," said Don Cosme, "the gentlemen had not quite finished their cigars."

"Oh! they can smoke here," replied the senora.

"Will the ladies not object to that?" I inquired.

"No—no—no!" ejaculated they, simultaneously.

"Perhaps you will join us?—we have heard that such is the custom of your country."

"It was the custom," said Don Cosme. "At present the young ladies of Mexico are rather ashamed of the habit."

"We no smoke—mamma, yes," added the elder—the brunette—whose name was Guadalupe.

"Ha! you speak English?"

"Little Englis' speak—no good Englis'," was the reply.

"Who taught you English?" I inquired, prompted by a mysterious curiosity.

"Un American us teach—Don Emilio."

"Ha! an American?"

"Yes, senor," said Don Cosme; "a gentleman from Very Cruz, who formerly visited our family."

I thought I could perceive a desire upon the part of our host not to speak further on this subject, and yet I felt a sudden, and, strange to say, a painful curiosity to know more about Don Emilio, the American, and his connection with our newly-made acquaintance. I can only explain this by asking the reader if he or she has not experienced a similar feeling while endeavoring to trace the unknown past of some being in whom either has lately taken an interest—an interest stronger than friendship?

That mamma smoked was clear, for the old lady had already gone through the process of unrolling one of the small, cartouche-like cigars. Having re-rolled it between her fingers, she placed it within the gripe of a pair of small golden pincers.

This done, she held one end to the coals that lay upon the *brazero*, and ignited the paper. Then, taking the other end between her thin, purplish lips, she breathed forth a blue cloud of aromatic vapor.

The conversation continued in English, and we were highly amused at the attempts of our new acquaintances to express themselves in that language.

After failing, on one occasion, to make herself understood, Guadalupe said, with some vexation in her manner:

"We wish brother was home come; brother speak ver' better Englis'."

"Where is he?" I inquired.

"In the ceety—Vera Cruz."

"Ha! and when did you expect him?"

"Thees day—to-night—he home come."

"Yes," added the Senora Joaquina, in Spanish; "he went to the city to spend a few days with a friend; but he was to return to-day, and we are looking for him to arrive in the evening."

"But how is he to get out?" cried the major, in his coarse, rough manner.

"How?—why, senor?" asked the ladies, in a breath, turning deadly pale.

"Why, he can't pass the pickets, ma'am," answered the major.

"Explain, captain; explain!" said the ladies, appealing to me with looks of anxiety.

I saw that concealment would be idle. The major had fired the train.

"It gives me pain, ladies," I said, in Spanish, "to inform you that you must be disappointed. I fear that your brother to-day is impossible."

"But why, captain?"

"Our lines are completely around Vera Cruz, and all intercourse to and from the city is at an end."

Had a shell fallen into Don Cosme's drawing-room, it could not have caused a greater change in the feelings of its inmates. Knowing nothing of military life, they had no idea that our presence there had drawn an impassable barrier between them and a much-loved member of their family. In a seclusion almost hermetical, they knew that a war existed between their country and the United States; but that was far away upon the Rio Grande. They had heard, moreover, that our fleet lay off Vera Cruz, and the pealing of the distant thunder of San Juan had from time to time reached their ears; but they had not dreamed, on seeing us, that the city was invested by land. The truth was now clear; and the anguish of the mother and daughters became afflicting, when we informed them of what we were unable to conceal—that it was the intention of the American commander to bombard the city.

The scene was to us deeply distressing.

Dona Joaquina wrung her hands, and called upon the Virgin with all the earnestness of entreaty. The sisters clung alternately to their mother and Don Cosme, weeping and crying aloud "*Pobre Narciso! nuestro hermanito—le asesinaran!*" (Poor Narciso!—our little brother—they will murder him!)

In the midst of this distressing scene the door of the drawing-room was thrown suddenly open, and a servant rushed in, shouting in an agitated voice, "*El norte! el norte!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE NORTHER."

We hurried after Don Cosme toward the ante-sala, both myself and my companions ignorant of this new object of dread.

When we emerged from the stairway, the scene that hailed us was one of terrific sublimity. Earth and heaven had undergone a sudden and convulsive change. The face of nature, but a moment since gay with summer smiles, was now hideously distorted. The sky had changed suddenly from its blue and sunny brightness to an aspect dark and portentous.

Along the north-west a vast volume of black vapor rolled up over the Sierra Madre, and rested upon the peaks of the mountains. From this, ragged masses, parting in fantastic forms and groupings, floated off against the concavity of the sky, as though the demons of the storm were breaking up from an angry council. Each of these, as it careered across the heavens, seemed bent on some spiteful purpose.

An isolated fragment hung lowering above the snowy cone of Orizava, like a huge vampire suspended over his sleeping victim.

From the great "parent cloud" that rested upon the Sierra Madre, lightning-bolts shot out and forked hither and thither, or sunk into the detached masses—the messengers of the storm-king, bearing his fiery mandates across the sky.

Away along the horizon of the east moved the yellow pillars of sand, whirled upward by the wind, like vast columnar towers leading to heaven.

The storm had not yet reached the rancho. The leaves lay motionless under a dark and ominous calm; but the wild screams of many birds—the shrieks of the swans—the discordant notes of the frightened pea-owl—the chattering of parrots, as they sought the shelter of the thick olives in terrified flight—all betokened the speedy advent of some fearful convulsion.

The rain in large drops fell upon the broad leaves, with a soft, plashing sound; and now and then a quick, short puff came snorting along, and, seizing the feathery frondage of the palms, shook them with a spiteful and ruffian energy.

The long green stripes, after oscillating a moment, would settle down again in graceful and motionless curves.

A low sound, like the "sough" of the sea, or the distant falling of water, came from the north; while at intervals the hoarse bark of the coyote, and the yelling of terrified monkeys, could be heard afar off in the woods.

"*Tapa la casa! tapa la casa!*" (cover the house!) cried Don Cosme, as soon as he had fairly got his head above ground.

"*Anda!—anda con los macates!*" (Quick with the cords!)

With lightning quickness a roll of palmetto mats came down on all sides of the house, completely covering the bamboo walls, and forming a screen impervious to both wind and rain. This was speedily fastened at all corners, and strong stays were carried out and warped around the trunks of trees. In five minutes the change was complete. The cage-looking structure had disappeared, and a house with walls of yellow *petate* stood in its place.

"Now, señores, all is secured," said Don Cosme. "Let us return to the drawing-room."

"I should like to see the first burst of this tornado," I remarked, not wishing to intrude upon the sorrow we had left.

"So be it," said the major. Stand here under the shelter, then.

"Not as you," said the major, wiping the perspiration from his broad forehead.

"In five minutes," said the coronel, you will be

chilled. At this point the heated atmosphere is now compressed. Patience! it will soon be scattered."

"How long will the storm continue?" I asked.

"*Por Dios!* señor, it is impossible to tell how long the '*norte*' may rage; sometimes for days, perhaps only for a few hours. This appears to be a '*huracana*.' If so, it will be short, but terrible while it lasts. *Carrambo!*"

A puff of cold, sharp wind came whistling past like an arrow. Another followed, and another, like the three seas that roll over the mighty ocean. Then, with a loud rushing sound, the broad, full blast went sweeping—strong, dark and dusty—bearing upon its mane the screeching and terrified birds, mingled with torn and flouted leaves.

The olives creaked and tossed about. The tall palms bowed and yielded, flinging out their long pinions like streamers. The broad leaves of the plantains flapped and whistled, and, bending gracefully, allowed the fierce blast to pass over.

Then a great cloud came rolling down, a thick vapor seemed to fill the space, and the air felt hot, and dark, and heavy. A choking, sulphurous smell rendered the breathing difficult, and for a moment day seemed changed to night.

Suddenly the whole atmosphere blazed forth in a sheet of flame, and the trees glistened as though they were on fire. An opaque darkness succeeded. Another flash, and along with it the crashing thunder—the artillery of Heaven—deafening all other sounds.

"Peal followed peal, the vast cloud was breached and burst by a hundred fiery bolts, and like an avalanche the heavy tropical rain was precipitated to the earth.

It fell in torrents, but the strength of the tempest had been spent on the first onslaught. The dark cloud passed on to the south, and a piercing cold wind swept after it.

"*Vamos a bajar, señores*" (let us descend, gentlemen), said Don Cosme, with a shiver, and he conducted us back to the stairway.

Clayley and the major looked toward me with an expression that said, "Shall we go in?" There were several reasons why our return to the drawing-room was unpleasant to myself and my companions. A scene of domestic affliction is ever painful to a stranger. How much more painful to us, knowing, as we did, that our countrymen—that we—had been the partial agents of this calamity! We hesitated a moment on the threshold.

"Gentlemen, we must return for a moment; we have been the bearers of evil tidings—let us offer such consolation as we may think of. Come!"

CHAPTER XV.

A LITTLE FAIR WEATHER AGAIN.

ON re-entering the sala the picture of woe was again presented, but in an altered aspect. A change, sudden as the atmospheric one we had just witnessed, had taken place, and the scene of wild weeping was now succeeded by one of resignation and prayer.

On one side was Dona Joaquina, holding in her hands a golden rosary with its crucifix. The girls were kneeling in front of a picture—a portrait of Dolores with the fatal dagger; and the "Lady of Grief" looked not more sorrowful from the canvas than the beautiful devotees that bent before her.

Not wishing to intrude upon this sacred sorrow, we made a motion to retire.

"No, señores," said Don Cosme, interrupting us; "be seated; let us talk calmly—let us know the worst."

We then proceeded to inform Don Cosme of the landing of the American troops, and the manner in which our lines were drawn around the city, and pointed out to him the impossibility of any one passing either in or out.

"There is still a hope, Don Cosme," said I, "and that, perhaps, rests with yourself."

The thought had struck me that a Spaniard of Don Cosme's evident rank and wealth might be enabled to procure access to the city by means of his consul, and through the Spanish ship-of-war that I recollected was lying off San Juan.

"Oh! name it, captain; name it!" cried he, while at the word "hope" the ladies had rushed forward, and stood clinging around me.

"There is a Spanish ship-of-war lying under the walls of Vera Cruz."

"We know it, we know it!" replied Don Cosme, eagerly.

"Ah! you know it, then?"

"Oh, yes," said Guadalupe. "Don Santiago is on board of her."

"Don Santiago?" inquired I; "who is he?"

"He is a relation of ours, captain," said Don Cosme; "an officer in the Spanish navy."

This information pained me, although I scarcely knew why.

"You have a friend, then, aboard the Spanish ship," said I to the elder of the sisters. "'Tis well; it will be in his power to restore to you your brother."

A ring of brightening faces was around me while I uttered these cheering words; and Don Cosme, grasping me by the hand, entreated me to proceed.

"This Spanish ship," I continued, "is still

allowed to keep up a communication with the town. You should proceed aboard at once, and by the assistance of this friend you may bring away your son before the bombardment commences. I see no difficulty; our batteries are not yet formed."

"I will go this instant!" said Don Cosme, leaping to his feet, while Dona Joaquina and her daughters ran out to make preparations for his journey.

Hope—sweet hope—was again in the ascendant.

"But how, señor," asked Don Cosme, as soon as they were gone—"how can I pass your lines? Shall I be permitted to reach the ship?"

"It will be necessary for me to accompany you, Don Cosme," I replied; "and I regret exceedingly that my duty will not permit me to return with you at once."

"Oh, señor!" exclaimed the Spaniard, with a painful expression.

"My business here," continued I, "is to procure pack-mules for the American army."

"Mules?"

"Yes. We were crossing for that purpose to a plain on the other side of the woods, where we had observed some animals of that description."

"'Tis true, captain—there are a hundred or more; they are mine—take them all."

"But it is our intention to pay for them, Don Cosme. The major here has the power to contract with you."

"As you please, gentlemen; but you will then return this way, and proceed to your camp?"

"As soon as possible," I replied. "How far distant is this plain?"

"Not more than a league. I would go with you, but—" Here Don Cosme hesitated, and approaching, said in a low tone, "The truth is, señor capitán, I should be glad if you would take them *without my consent*. I have mixed but little in the politics of this country; but Santa Anna is my enemy—he will ask no better motive for despoiling me."

"I understand you," said I. "Then, Don Cosme, we will take your mules by force, and carry yourself a prisoner to the American camp—a Yankee return for your hospitality."

"It is good," replied the Spaniard, with a smile.

"Señor capitán," continued he, "you are without a sword. Will you favor me by accepting this?"

Don Cosme held out to me a rapier of Toledo steel, with a golden scabbard richly chased, and bearing on its hilt the eagle and nopal of Mexico.

"It is a family relic, and once belonged to the brave Guadalupe Victoria."

"Ah! indeed!" I exclaimed, taking the sword. "I shall value it much. Thanks, señor! thanks! Now, major, we are ready to proceed."

"A glass of maraschino, gentlemen?" said Don Cosme, as a servant appeared with a flask and glasses.

"Thank you—yes," grunted the major; "and while we are drinking it, Señor Don, let me give you a hint. You appear to have plenty of *pewter*." Here the major touched a gold sugar-dish, which the servant was carrying upon a tray of chased silver; "take my word for it, you can't bury it too soon."

"It is true, Don Cosme," said I, translating to him the major's advice. "We are not French, but there are robbers who hang on the skirts of every army."

Don Cosme promised to follow the hint with alacrity, and we prepared to take our departure from the rancho.

"I will give you a guide, señor capitán; you will find my people with the *mulada*. Please compel them to lasso the cattle for you. You will obtain what you want in the corral. *Adios, señores!*"

"Farewell, Don Cosme!"

"Adieu, ladies, adieu!"

"*Adios, capitán! adios! adios!*"

I held out my hand to the younger of the girls, who instantly caught it and pressed it to her lips. It was the action of a child. Guadalupe followed the example of her sister, but evidently with a degree of reserve. What, then, should have caused this difference in their manner?

In the next moment we were ascending the stairway.

"Lucky dog!" growled the major. "Take a ducking myself for that."

"Both beautiful, by Jove!" said Clayley; "but of all the women I ever saw, give me 'Mary of the Light.'"

Our route lay through a dense chaparral—now crossing a sandy spur, covered with mezquite and acacia; then sinking into the bed of some silent creek, shaded with old cork-trees, whose gnarled and venerable trunks were laced together by a thousand parasites. Two miles from the rancho we reached the banks of a considerable stream, which we conjectured was a branch of the Jamapa river.

On both sides a fringe of dark forest-trees hung out long branches extending half-way across the stream. The water flowed darkly

underneath. Huge lilies stood out from the banks—their broad, wax-like leaves trailing upon the glassy ripple.

Here and there were pools fringed with drooping willows and belts of green *tule*. Other aquatic plants rose from the water to the height of twenty feet; among which we distinguished the beautiful "iris," with its tall, spear-like stem, ending in a brown cylinder, like the pompon of a grenadier's cap.

As we approached the banks, the pelican, scared from his lonely haunt, rose upon heavy wing, and with a shrill scream flapped away through the dark aisles of the forest. The cayman plunged sullenly into the sedgy water; and the "Sajou" monkey, suspended by his prehensile tail from some overhanging bough, oscillated to and fro, and filled the air with his hideous, half-human cries.

Halting for a moment to refill the canteens, we crossed over and ascended the opposite bank. A hundred paces further on, the guide, who had gone ahead, cried out from an eminence, "*Mira la caballada!*"—(Yonder's the drove!)

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CORRAL.

PUSHING through the jungle, we ascended the eminence. A brilliant picture opened before us. The storm had suddenly lulled, and the tropical sun shone down upon the flowery surface of the earth, bathing its verdure in a flood of yellow light.

It was several hours before sunset, but the bright orb had commenced descending toward the snowy cone of Orizava, and his rays had assumed that golden red which characterizes the ante-twilight of the tropics. The short-lived storm had swept the heavens, and the blue roof of the world was without a cloud. The dark masses had rolled away over the southeast horizon, and were now spending their fury upon the dyewood forests of Honduras and Tabasco.

At our feet lay the prairie, spread before us like a green carpet, and bounded upon the further side by a dark wall of forest-trees. Several clumps of timber grew like islands on the plain, adding to the picturesque character of the landscape.

Near the center of the prairie stood a small rancho, surrounded by a high picket fence. This we at once recognized as the "corral" mentioned by Don Cosme.

At some distance from the inclosure thousands of cattle were browsing upon the grassy level, their spotted flanks and long, upright horns showing their descent from the famous race of Spanish bulls. Some of them, straggling from the herd, rambled through the "mottes," or lay stretched out under the shade of some isolated palm-tree. Ox-bells were tinkling their cheerful but monotonous music. Hundreds of horses and mules mingled with the herd; and we could distinguish a couple of leather-clad vaqueros galloping from point to point on their swift mustangs.

We commenced descending into the plain, and the vaqueros, catching a glimpse of our uniforms, simultaneously reined up their mustangs with a sudden jerk. We could see from their gestures that they were frightened at the approach of our party. This was not strange, as the major, mounted upon his great, gaunt charger, loomed up against the blue sky like a colossus. The Mexicans, doubtless, had never seen anything in the way of horseflesh bigger than the mustangs they were riding, and this apparition, with the long line of uniformed soldiers descending the hill, was calculated to alarm them severely.

"Them fellers is gwine to put, cap'n," said Lincoln, touching his cap respectfully.

"You're right, sergeant," I replied, "and without them we might as well think of catching the wind as one of these mules."

"If yer'll just let me draw a bead on the near mustang, I kin kripple him 'ithout hurtin' the thing ther's in the saddle."

"It would be a pity. No, sergeant," answered I. "I might stop them by sending forward the guide," I continued, addressing myself rather than Lincoln; "but no, it will not do; there must be the appearance of force. I have promised. Major, would you have the goodness to ride forward, and prevent those fellows from galloping off?"

"Lord, captain!" said the major, with a terrified look, "you don't think I could overtake such Arabs as them? Hercules is slow—slow as a crab."

Now, this was a *lie*, and I knew it! for "Hercules," the major's great, raw-boned steed, was as fleet as the wind.

"Then, major, perhaps you will allow Mr. Clayley to make trial of him," I suggested. "He is light weight. I assure you that, without the assistance of these Mexicans, we shall not be able to catch a single mule."

The major, seeing that all eyes were fixed upon him, suddenly straightened himself up in his stirrups, and, swelling with courage and importance, declared:

"If that was the case, he would go himself." Then, calling upon "Doc" to follow him, he

struck the spurs into Hercules, and rode forward at a gallop.

It proved that this was just the very course to start the vaqueros, as the major had inspired them with more terror than all the rest of our party. They showed evident symptoms of taking to their heels, and I shouted to them at the top of my voice:

"*Alto! somos amigos.*"—(Halt! we are friends.)

The words were scarcely out of my mouth when the Mexicans drove their rowels into their mustangs, and galloped off as if for their lives, in the direction of the corral.

The major followed at a slashing pace, Doc bringing up the rear; while the basket which the latter carried over his arm began to eject its contents, scattering the commissariat of the major over the prairie. Fortunately, the hospitality of Don Cosme had already provided a substitute for this loss.

After a run of about half-a-mile, Hercules began to gain rapidly upon the mustangs, whereas Doc was losing distance in an inverse ratio. The Mexicans had got within a couple of hundred yards of the rancho, the major not over a hundred in the rear, when I observed the latter suddenly pull up, and, jerking the long body of Hercules round, commence riding briskly back, all the while looking over his shoulder toward the inclosure.

The vaqueros did not halt at the corral, as we expected, but kept across the prairie, and disappeared among the trees on the opposite side.

"What the deuce has got into Blossom?" inquired Clayley; "he was clearly gaining upon them. The old bloat must have burst a blood-vessel."

CHAPTER XVII.

A BRUSH WITH THE GUERRILLEROS.

"WHY, what was the matter, major?" inquired I, as the major rode up, blowing like a porpoise.

"Matter!" replied he, with one of his direst imprecations—"matter, indeed! You wouldn't have me ride plump into their works, would you?"

"Works!" echoed I, in some surprise; "what do you mean by that, major?"

"I mean works—that's all. There's a stockade ten feet high, as full as it can stick of them."

"Full of what?"

"Full of the enemy—full of rancheros. I saw their ugly copper faces—a dozen of them at least—looking at me over the pickets; and, sure as heaven, if I had gone ten paces further, they would have riddled me like a target."

"But, major, they were only peaceable rancheros—cowherds—nothing more."

"Cowherds! I tell you, captain, that those two mahogany-colored devils that galloped off had a sword apiece strapped to their saddles. I saw them when I got near; they were decoys to bring us up to that stockade—I'll bet my life upon it!"

"Well, major," rejoined I, "they're far enough from the stockade now; and the best we can do in their absence will be to examine it, and see what chances it may offer to corral these mules; for, unless they can be driven into it, we shall have to return to camp empty-handed."

Saying this, I moved forward with the men, the major keeping in the rear.

We soon reached the formidable stockade, which proved to be nothing more than a regular corral, such as are found on the great *haciendas de ganados* (cattle farms) of Spanish America. In one corner was a house, constructed of upright poles, with a thatch of palm-leaves. This contained the lazos, *alparejas*, saddles, etc., of the vaqueros; and in the door of this house stood a decrepit old zambo, the only human thing about the place. The zambo's woolly head over the pickets had reflected itself a dozen times on the major's terrified imagination.

After examining the corral I found it excellent for our purpose, provided we could only succeed in driving the mules into it; and, throwing open the bars, we proceeded to make the attempt. The mules were browsing quietly at the distance of a quarter of a mile from the corral.

Marching past the drove, I deployed the company in the form of a semicircle, forming a complete cordon round the animals; then, closing in upon them slowly, the soldiers commenced driving them toward the pen.

We were somewhat awkward at this new duty; but by means of a shower of small rocks, pieces of *bois de vache*, and an occasional "heigh, heigh!" the mules were soon in motion and in the required direction.

The major, with Doc and little Jack, being the mounted men of the party, did great service, especially Jack, who was highly delighted with this kind of thing, and kept Twidget in a constant gallop from right to left.

As the *mulada* neared the gates of the inclosure, the two extremes of the semi-circumference gradually approached each other, closing in toward the corral.

The mules were already within fifty paces of the entrance, the soldiers coming up about two hundred yards in the rear, when a noise like the tramping of many hoofs arrested our attention. The quick, sharp note of a cavalry bugle rung out across the plain, followed by a wild yell, as though a band of Indian warriors were swooping down upon the foe.

In an instant every eye was turned, and we beheld with consternation a cloud of horsemen springing out from the woods and dashing along in the headlong velocity of a charge.

It required but a single glance to satisfy me that they were guerrilleros. Their picturesque attire, their peculiar arms, and the parti-colored bannerets upon their lances, were not to be mistaken.

We stood for a moment as if thunderstruck; a sharp cry rose along the deployed line.

I signaled to the bugler, who gave the command, "Rally upon the center!"

As if by one impulse, the whole line closed in with a run upon the gates of the inclosure. The mules, impelled by the sudden rush, dashed forward pell-mell, blocking up the entrance.

On came the guerrilleros, with streaming pennons and lances couched, shouting their wild cries.

"*Andela! andela! Mueralos Yankees!*" (Forward! forward! Death to the Yankees!)

The foremost of the soldiers were already upon the heels of the crowded mules, pricking them with bayonets. The animals began to kick and plunge in the most furious manner, causing a new danger in front.

"Face about—fire!" I commanded at this moment.

An irregular but well-directed volley emptied half-a-dozen saddles, and for a moment staggered the charging line; but, before my men could reload, the guerrilleros, had leaped clear over their fallen comrades, and were swooping down with cries of vengeance. A dozen of their bravest men were already within shot-range, firing their escopettes and pistols as they came down.

Our position had now grown fearfully critical. The mules still blocked up the entrance, preventing the soldiers from taking shelter behind the stockade; and before we could reload, the rearmost would be at the mercy of the enemy's lances.

Seizing the major's servant by the arm, I dragged him from his horse, and, leaping into the saddle, flung myself upon the rear. Half-a-dozen of my bravest men, among whom were Lincoln, Chane, and the Frenchman Raoul, rallied around the horse, determined to receive the cavalry charge on the short bayonets of their rifles. Their pieces were all empty!

At this moment my eye rested on one of the soldiers, a brave but slow-footed German, who was still twenty paces in the rear of his comrades, making every effort to come up. Two of the guerrilleros were rushing upon him with couched lances. I galloped out to his rescue; but before I could reach him the lance of the foremost Mexican crashed through the soldier's skull, shivering it like a shell. The barb and bloody pennon came out on the opposite side. The man was lifted from the ground, and carried several paces upon the shaft of the lance.

The guerrillero dropped his entangled weapon; but before he could draw any other, the sword of Victoria was through his heart.

His comrade turned upon me with a cry of vengeance. I had not yet disengaged my weapon to ward off the thrust. The lance's point was within three feet of my breast, when a sharp crack was heard from behind; the lancer threw out his arms with a spasmodic jerk; his long spear was whirled into the air, and he fell back in his saddle, dead.

"Well done, Jack! fire and scissors! who showed yer that trick? whooray! whoop!" and I heard the voice of Lincoln, in a sort of Indian yell, rising high above the din.

At this moment a guerrillero, mounted upon a powerful black mustang, came galloping down. This man, unlike most of his comrades, was armed with the saber, which he evidently wielded with great dexterity. He came dashing on, his white teeth set in a fierce smile.

"Ha! Monsieur le Capitaine," shouted he, as he came near, "still alive? I thought I had finished you on Lobos; not too late yet."

I recognized the deserter, Dubrosc!

"Villain!" I ejaculated, too full of rage to utter another word.

We met at full speed, but with my unmanageable horse I could only ward off his blow as he swept past me. We wheeled again, and galloped toward each other—both of us impelled by hatred; but my horse again shied, frightened by the gleaming saber of my antagonist. Before I could rein him round, he had brought me close to the pickets of the corral; and on turning to meet the deserter, I found that we were separated by a band of dark objects.

It was a detachment of mules, that had backed from the gates of the corral and were escaping to the open plain. We reined up, eyeing each other with impatient vengeance; but the bullets of my men began to whistle from the pickets; and Dubrosc, with a threatening gesture, wheeled his horse and galloped off to

his comrades. They had retired beyond range, and were halted in groups upon the prairie, chafing with disappointment and rage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A HERCULEAN FEAT.

THE whole skirmish did not occupy two minutes. It was like most charges of Mexican cavalry—a dash, a wild yelling, half-a-dozen empty saddles, and a hasty retreat.

The guerrilleros had swerved off as soon as they perceived that we had gained a safe position, and the bullets of our reloaded pieces began to whistle around their ears. Dubrosc alone, in his impetuosity, galloped close up to the inclosure; and it was only on perceiving himself alone, and the folly of exposing himself thus fruitlessly, that he wheeled round and followed the Mexicans. The latter were now out upon the prairie, beyond the range of small-arms, grouped around their wounded comrades, or galloping to and fro, with yells of disappointed vengeance.

I entered the corral, where most of my men had sheltered themselves behind the stockades. Little Jack sat upon Twidget, reloading his rifle, and trying to appear insensible to the flattering encomiums that hailed him from all sides. A compliment from Lincoln, however, was too much for Jack, and a proud smile was seen upon the face of the boy.

"Thank you, Jack," said I, as I passed him; "I see you can use a rifle to some purpose."

Jack held down his head, without saying a word, and appeared to be very busy about the lock of his piece.

In the skirmish, Lincoln had received the scratch of a lance, at which he was chafing in his own peculiar way, and vowing revenge upon the giver. It might be said that he had taken this, as he had driven his short bayonet through his antagonist's arm, and sent him off with his member hanging by his side.

But the hunter was not content; and as he retired sullenly into the inclosure, he turned round and, shaking his fist at the Mexican, muttered savagely:

"Yer darned skunk! I'll know yer ag'in. See if I don't git yer yit!"

Gravenitz, a Prussian soldier, had also been too near a lance, and several others had received slight wounds. The German was the only one killed. He was still lying out on the plain, where he had fallen, the long shaft of the lance standing up out of his skull. Not ten feet distant lay the corpse of his slayer, glistening in its gaudy and picturesque attire.

The other guerrillero, as he fell, had noosed one of his legs in the lazo that hung from the horn of his saddle, and was now dragged over the prairie after his wild and snorting mustang. As the animal swerved, at every jerk his limber body bounded to the distance of twenty feet, where it would lie motionless until slung into the air by a fresh pluck on the lazo.

As we were watching this horrid spectacle, several of the guerrilleros galloped after, while half a dozen others were observed spurring their steeds toward the rear of the corral. On looking in this direction we perceived a huge red horse, with an empty saddle, scouring at full speed across the prairie. A single glance showed us that this horse was Hercules.

"Good Heavens! the major!"

"Safe somewhere," replied Clayley; "but where the deuce can he be? He is not *hors de combat* on the plain, or one could see him even ten miles off. Ha! ha! ha!—look yonder!"

Clayley, yelling with laughter, pointed to the corner of the rancho.

Though after a scene so tragic, I could hardly refrain from joining Clayley in his boisterous mirth. Hanging by the belt of his saber upon a high picket was the major, kicking and struggling with all his might. The waist-strap, tightly drawn by the bulky weight of the wearer, separated his body into two vast rotundities, while his face was distorted and purple with the agony of suspense and suspension. He was loudly bellowing for help, and several soldiers were running toward him; but, from the manner in which he jerked his body up, and screwed his neck, so as to enable him to look over the stockade, it was evident that the principal cause of his uneasiness lay on the "other side of the fence."

The truth was, the major, on the first appearance of the enemy, had galloped toward the rear of the corral, and finding no entrance, had thrown himself from the back of Hercules upon the stockade, intending to climb over; but having caught a glance of some guerrilleros, he had suddenly let go his bridle and attempted to precipitate himself into the corral.

His waist-belt, catching upon a sharp picket, held him suspended midway, still under the impression that the Mexicans were close upon his rear. He was soon unhooked, and now waddled across the corral, uttering a thick and continuous volley of his choicest oaths.

Our eyes were now directed toward Hercules. The horsemen had closed upon him within fifty yards, and were winding their long lazoos in the air. The major, to all appearance, had lost his horse.

After galloping to the edge of the woods, Her-

cules suddenly halted, and threw up the trailing bridle with a loud neigh. His pursuers, coming up, flung out their lazoos. Two of these, settling over his head, noosed him around the neck. The huge brute, as if aware of the necessity of a desperate effort to free himself, dropped his nose to the ground, and stretched himself out in full gallop.

The lariats, one by one tightening over his bony chest, snapped like threads, almost jerking the mustangs from their feet. The long fragments sailed out like streamers as he careered across the prairie, far ahead of his yelling pursuers.

He now made directly for the corral. Several of the soldiers ran toward the stockade, in order to seize the bridle when he should come up; but Hercules, spying his old comrade—the horse of the "doctor"—within the inclosure, first neighed loudly, and then, throwing all his nerve into the effort, sprang high over the picket fence.

A cheer rose from the men, who had watched with interest his efforts to escape, and who now welcomed him as if he had been one of themselves.

"Two months' pay for your horse, major!" cried Clayley.

"Och, the bewtiful bastel! He's worth the full of his skin in goold. By my sowl! the capten ought to have 'im," ejaculated Chane; and various other encomiums were uttered in honor of Hercules.

Meanwhile, his pursuers, not daring to approach the stockade, drew off toward their comrades, with gestures of disappointment and chagrin.

CHAPTER XIX.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

I BEGAN to reflect upon the real danger of our situation—corralled upon a naked prairie, ten miles from camp, with no prospect of escape. I knew that we could defend ourselves against twice the number of our cowardly adversaries; they would never dare to come within range of our rifles. But how to get out? how to cross the open plain? Fifty infantry against four times that number of mounted men—lancers at that—and not a bush to shelter the foot-soldier from the long spear and the iron hoof!

The nearest motte was half-a-mile off, and that another half-mile from the edge of the woods. even could the motte be reached by a desperate run, it would be impossible to gain the woods, as the enemy would certainly cordon our new position, and thus completely cut us off. At present they had halted in a body about four hundred yards from the corral, and, feeling secure of having us in a trap, most of them had dismounted and were running out their mustangs upon their lazoos. It was plainly their determination to take us by siege.

To add to our desperate circumstances, we discovered that there was not a drop of water in the corral. The thirst that follows a fight had exhausted the scanty supply of our canteens, and the heat was excessive.

As I was running over in my mind the perils of our position, my eye rested upon Lincoln, who stood with his piece at a carry, his left hand crossed over his breast, in the attitude of a soldier waiting to receive orders.

"Well, sergeant, what is it?" I inquired.

"Will yer allow me, cap'n, ter take a couple o' files and fetch in the Dutchman? The men 'ud like ter put a sod upon him afore them thievin' robbers kin get at him."

"Certainly. But will you be safe? He's at some distance from the stockade."

"I don't think them fellers 'll kum down—they've had enuf o' it, jest now. We'll run out quick, and the boys kin kiver us with their fire."

"Very well, then; set about it."

Lincoln returned to the company, and selected four of the most active of his men, with whom he proceeded toward the entrance. I ordered the soldiers to throw themselves on that side of the inclosure, and cover the party in case of an attack; but none was made. A movement was visible among the Mexicans as they perceived Lincoln and his party rush out toward the body; but, seeing they would be too late to prevent them from carrying it off, they wisely kept beyond the reach of the American rifles.

The body of the German was brought into the inclosure and buried with due ceremony, although his comrades believed that before many hours it would be torn from its "warrior-grave," dragged forth to feed the coyote and vulture, and his bones left to whiten upon the naked prairie. Which of us knew that it might not in a few hours be his own fate?

"Gentlemen," said I to my brother officers, as we came together, "can you suggest any mode of escape?"

"Our only chance is to fight them where we stand. There are four to one," replied Clayley.

"We have no other chance, captain," said Oakes, with a shake of the head.

"But it is not their intention to fight us. Their design is to starve us. See! they are picketing their horses, knowing that they can easily overtake us if we attempt to leave the inclosure."

"Cannot we move in a hollow square?"

"But what is a hollow square of fifty men? and against four times that number of cavalry, with lances and lassoes? No, no; they would shiver it with a single charge. Our only hope is that we may be able to hold out until our absence from camp may bring a detachment to our relief."

"And why not send for it?" inquired the major, who had scarcely been asked for his advice, but whose wits had been sharpened by the extremity of his danger. "Why not send for a couple of regiments?"

"How are we to send, major?" asked Clayley, looking on the major's proposition as ludicrous under the circumstances. "Have you a pigeon in your pocket?"

"Why?—how? There's Hercules runs like a hare; stick one of your fellows in the saddle, and I'll warrant him to camp in an hour."

"You are right, major," said I, catching at the major's proposal; "thank you for the thought. If he could only pass that point in the woods. I hate it, but it is our only chance."

The last sentence I muttered to myself.

"Why do you hate it, captain?" inquired the major, who had overheard me.

"You might not understand my reasons, major."

I was thinking upon the disgrace of being trapped as I was, and on my first scout too.

"Who will volunteer to ride an express to camp?" I inquired, addressing the men.

Twenty of them leaped out simultaneously.

"Which of you remembers the course, that you could follow it in a gallop?" I asked.

The Frenchman, Raoul, stood forth, touching his cap.

"I know a shorter one, captain, by Mata Cordera."

"Ha! Raoul, you know the country? You are the man."

I now remembered that this man joined us at Sacrificios, just after the landing of the expedition. He had been living in the country previous to our arrival, and was well acquainted with it.

"Are you a good horseman?" I inquired.

"I have seen five years of cavalry service."

"True. Do you think you can pass them? They are nearly in your track."

"As we entered the prairie, captain; but my route will lie past this motte to the left."

"That will give you several points. Do not stop a moment after you have mounted, or they will take the hint and intercept you."

"With the red horse there will be no danger, captain."

"Leave your gun; take these pistols. Ha! you have a pair in the holsters. See if they are loaded. These spurs—so—cut loose that heavy piece from the saddle: the cloak too; you must have nothing to incumber you. When you come near the camp, leave your horse in the chaparral. Give this to Colonel C—."

I wrote the following words on a scrap of paper:

"DEAR COLONEL: Two hundred will be enough. Could they be stolen out after night? If so, all will be well—if it gets abroad . . . —Yours, "H. H."

As I handed the paper to Raoul, I whispered in his ear:

"To Colonel C—'s own hand. Privately, Raoul—privately, do you hear?"

Colonel C— was my friend, and I knew that he would send a *private* party to my rescue.

"I understand, captain," was the answer of Raoul.

"Ready, then! Now mount and be off."

The Frenchman sprang nimbly to the saddle, and, driving his spurs into the flanks of his horse, shot out from the pen like a flash of lightning.

For the first three hundred yards or so he galloped directly toward the guerrilleros. These stood leaning upon their saddles or lay stretched along the green sward. Seeing a single horseman riding toward them, few of them moved, believing him to be some messenger sent to treat for our surrender.

Suddenly the Frenchman swerved from his direct course, and went sweeping around them in the curve of an ellipse.

They now perceived the ruse, and with a yell leaped into their saddles. Some fired their esopettes; others, unwinding their lazoos, started in pursuit.

Raoul had by this time set Hercules's head for the clump of timber which he had taken as his guide, and now kept on in a track almost rectilinear. Could he but reach the motte or clump in safety, he knew that there were straggling trees beyond, and these would secure him in some measure from the lazoos of his pursuers.

We stood watching his progress with breathless silence. Our lives depended on his escape. A crowd of the guerrilleros was between him and us; but we could still see the green jacket of the soldier and the great red flanks of Hercules as he bounded on toward the edge of the woods. Then we saw the lazoos launched out and spinning around Raoul's head; and straggling shots were fired; and we fancied at one time that our comrade sprang up in the saddle,

as if he had been hit. Then he appeared again, all safe, rounding the little islet of timber, and the next moment he was gone from our sight. Then followed a while of suspense—of terrible suspense—for the motte hid from view both pursuers and pursued. Every eye was straining toward the point where the horseman had disappeared, when Lincoln, who had climbed to the top of the rancho, cried out:

"He's safe, cap'n! The dod-rotted skunks air kummin' 'thout him."

It was true. A minute after the horsemen appeared round the motte, riding slowly back, with that air and attitude that betokened disappointment.

CHAPTER XX.

A SHORT FIGHT AT "LONG SHOT."

THE escape of Raoul and Hercules produced an effect almost magical upon the enemy. Instead of the listless defensive attitude lately assumed, the guerrilleros were now in motion like a nest of roused hornets, scouring over the plain and yelling like a war-party of Indians.

They did not surround the corral, as I had anticipated they would. They had no fear that we should attempt to escape; but they knew that, instead of the three days in which they expected to kill us with thirst at their leisure, they had not three hours left to accomplish that object. Raoul would reach the camp in little more than an hour's time, and either infantry or mounted men would be on them in two hours after.

Scouts were seen galloping off in the direction taken by Raoul, and others dashed into the woods on the opposite side of the prairie. All was hurry and scurry.

Along with Clayley I had climbed upon the roof of the rancho, to watch the motions of the enemy, and to find out, if possible, his intentions. We stood for some time without speaking, both of us gazing at the maneuvers of the guerrilleros. They were galloping to and fro over the prairie, excited by the escape of Raoul.

"Splendidly done!" exclaimed my companion, struck with their graceful horsemanship. "One of those fellows, captain, as he sits, at this minute, would—"

"Ha! what?" shouted he, suddenly turning and pointing toward the woods.

I looked in the direction indicated. A cloud of dust was visible at the *debouchement* of the Medellin road. It appeared to hang over a small body of troops upon the march. The sun was just setting; and, as this cloud lay toward the west, I could distinguish the sparkling of bright objects through its dim volume. The guerrilleros had reined up their horses, and were eagerly gazing toward the same point.

Presently the dust was wafted aside—a dozen dark forms became visible—and in the midst a bright object flashed under the sun like a sheet of gold. At the same instant an insulting shout broke from the guerrilleros, and a voice was heard exclaiming—

"*Cenobio! Cenobio! Los canones!*" (*Cenobio! Cenobio! the cannon!*)

Clayley turned toward me with an inquiring look.

"It is true, Clayley; by Heavens, we'll have it now!"

"What did they say?"

"Look for yourself—well?"

"A brass piece, as I live!—a six-pound cannon!"

"We are fighting the guerrilla of Cenobio, a small army of itself. Neither stockade nor motte will avail us now."

"What is to be done?" asked my companion.

"Nothing but die with arms in our hands. We will not die without a struggle, and the sooner we prepare for it the better."

I leaped from the roof, and ordered the bugler to sound the *assembly*.

In a moment the clear notes rung out, and the soldiers formed before me in the corral.

"My brave comrades!" cried I, "they have got the advantage of us at last. They are bringing down a piece of artillery, and I fear these pickets will offer us but poor shelter. If we are driven out, let us strike for that island of timber; and, mark me—if we are broken, let every man fight his way as he best can, or die over a fallen enemy."

A determined cheer followed this short harangue, and I continued:

"But let us first see how they use their piece. It is a small one, and will not destroy us all at once. Fling yourselves down as they fire. By lying flat on your faces you may not suffer so badly. Perhaps we can hold the corral until our friends reach us. At all events, we shall try."

Another cheer rung along the line.

"Great Heaven, captain! it's terrible!" whispered the major.

"What is terrible?" I asked, feeling at the moment a contempt for this blaspheming coward.

"Oh! this—this business—such a fix to be—"

"Major! remember you are a soldier."

"Yes; and I wish I had resigned, as I intended to do, before the cursed war commenced."

"Never fear," said I, tempted to smile at the candor of his cowardice; "you'll drink wine at Hewlett's in a month. Get behind this log—it's the only point shot-proof in the whole stockade."

"Do you think, captain, it will stop a shot?"

"Ay—from a siege gun. Look out, men, and be ready to obey orders!"

The six-pounder had now approached within five-hundred yards of the stockade, and was leisurely being unlimbered in the midst of a group of the enemy's artillerymen.

At this moment the voice of the major arrested my attention.

"Great Heaven, captain! Why do you allow them to come so near?"

"How am I to prevent them?" I asked, with some surprise.

"Why, my rifle will reach further than that. It might keep them off, I think."

"Major, you are dreaming!" said I. "They are two hundred yards beyond range of our rifles. If they would only come within that, we should soon send them back for you."

"But, captain, mine will carry twice the distance."

I looked at the major, under the belief that he had taken leave of his senses.

"It's a *zundnadel*, I assure you, and will kill at eight hundred yards."

"Is it possible?" cried I, starting; for I now recollected the curious-looking piece which I had ordered to be cut loose from the saddle of Hercules. "Why did you not tell me that before? Where is Major Blossom's rifle?" I shouted, looking around.

"This hyur's the major's gun, answered Sergeant Lincoln. "But if it's a rifle, I never see'd sich. It looks more like a two-year old cannon."

It was, as the major had declared, a Prussian needle-gun—then a new invention, but of which I had heard something.

"Is it loaded, major?" I asked, taking the piece from Lincoln.

"It is."

"Can you hit that man with the sponge?" said I, returning the piece to the hunter.

"If this hyur thing'll carry fur enuf, I kin," was the reply.

"It will kill at a thousand yards, cried the major, with energy.

"Ha! are you sure of that, major?" I asked.

"Certainly, captain. I got it from the inventor. We tried it at Washington. It is loaded with a conical bullet. It bored a hole through an inch plank at that distance."

"Well. Now, sergeant, take sure aim; this may save us yet."

Lincoln planted himself firmly on his feet, choosing a notch of the stockade that ranged exactly with his shoulder. He then carefully wiped the dust from the sights, and, placing the heavy barrel in the notch, laid his cheek slowly against the stock.

"Sergeant, the man with the shot!" I called out.

As I spoke, one of the artillerymen was stooping to the muzzle of the six-pounder, holding in his hand a spherical case-shot. Lincoln pressed the trigger; the crack followed, and the artilleryman threw out his arms, and doubled over on his head without giving a kick.

The shot that he had held rolled out upon the green sward. A wild cry, expressive of extreme astonishment, broke from the guerrilleros. At the same instant a cheer rung through the corral.

"Well done!" cried a dozen of voices at once.

In a moment the rifle was wiped and reloaded.

"This time, sergeant, the fellow with the linstock."

During the reloading of the rifle, the Mexicans around the six-pounder had somewhat recovered from their surprise, and had rammed home the cartridge. A tall artilleryman stood, with linstock and fuse, near the breech, waiting for the order to fire. Before he received that order the rifle again cracked; his arm flew up with a sudden jerk, and the smoking rod, flying from his grasp, was projected to the distance of twenty feet. The man himself spun round, and, staggering a pace or two, fell into the arms of his comrades.

"Cap'n, jest allow me ter take that ere skunk next time."

"Which one, sergeant?" I asked.

"Him thet's on the black, makin' such a dot-rotted muss."

I recognized the horse and figure of Dubrosc. "Certainly, by all means," said I, with a strange feeling at my heart, as I gave the order.

But before Lincoln could reload, one of the Mexicans, apparently an officer, had snatched up the burning fuse, and, running up, applied it to the touch.

"On your faces, men!"

The ball came crashing through the thin pickets of the corral, and, whizzing across the inclosure, struck one of the mules on the flank, tearing open its hip, causing it to kick furiously as it tumbled over the ground. Its companions, stampeding, galloped for a moment through the pen; then, collecting in a corner, stood cowed

ered up and quivering. A fierce yell announced the exultation of the guerrilleros.

Dubrosc was sitting on his powerful mustang, facing the corral, and watching the effects of the shot.

"If he wur only 'ithin range ov my own rifle!" muttered Lincoln, as he glanced along the sights of the strange piece.

The crack soon followed—the black horse reared, staggered, and fell back on his rider.

"Ten-strike; set 'em up!" exclaimed a soldier.

"Missed the skunk—curse him!" cried Lincoln, gritting his teeth, as the horseman was seen to struggle from under the fallen animal.

Rising to his feet, Dubrosc sprung out to the front, and shook his fist in the air with a shout of defiance.

The guerrilleros galloped back; and the artillerymen, wheeling the six-pounder, dragged it after, and took up a new position, about three hundred yards to the rear.

A second shot from the piece again tore through the pickets, striking one of our men, and killing him instantly.

"Aim at the artillerymen, sergeant. We have nothing to fear from the others."

Lincoln fired again. The shot hit the ground in front of the enemy's gun; but glancing, it struck one of the cannoniers, apparently wounding him badly, as he was carried back by his comrades.

The Mexicans, terror-struck at this strange instrument of destruction, took a new position, two hundred yards still further back. Their third shot ricocheted, striking the top of the strong plank behind which the major was screening himself, and only frightening the latter by the shock upon the timber.

Lincoln fired again. This time his shot produced no visible effect, and a taunting cheer from the enemy told that they felt themselves beyond range.

Another shot was fired from the *zundnadel*, apparently with a similar result.

"It's beyond her carry, cap'n," said Lincoln, bringing the butt of his piece to the ground, with an expression of reluctant conviction.

"Try one more shot. If it fail, we can reserve the others for closer work. Aim high!"

This resulted as the two preceding ones, and a voice from the guerrilleros was heard, exclaiming:

"*Yankees bobos! mas adelante!*" (A little further, you Yankee fools!)

Another shot from the six-pounder cracked through the planks, knocking his piece from the hands of a soldier, and shivering the dry stock-wood into fifty fragments.

"Sergeant, give me the rifle," said I. "They must be a thousand yards off; but they are as troublesome with that carronade as if they were only ten, I shall try one more shot."

I fired, but the ball sunk at least fifty paces in front of the enemy.

"We expect too much. It is not a twenty-four pounder. Major, I envy you two things—your rifle and your horse."

"Hercules?"

"Of course."

"Lord, captain! you may do what you will with the rifle; and if ever we get out of the reach of these infernal devils, Hercules shall be—"

At this moment a cheer came from the guerrilleros, and a voice was heard shouting above the din:

"*La metralla! la metralla!*" (The howitzer!)

I leaped upon the roof, and looked out upon the plain. It was true. A howitzer-carriage, drawn by mules, was debouching from the woods, the animals dragging it along at a gallop.

It was evidently a piece of some size, large enough to tear the light picketing that screened us to atoms.

I turned toward my men with a look of despair. My eye at this moment rested on the drove of mules that stood crowded together in a corner of the pen. A sudden thought struck me. Might we not mount them and escape? There were more than enough to carry us all. I instantly leaped from the roof and gave orders to the men.

"Speedily, but without noise!" cried I, as the soldiers proceeded to fling bridles upon the necks of the animals.

In five minutes each man, with his rifle slung, stood by a mule, some of them having buckled on *tapadas*, to prevent the animals from kicking.

The major stood ready by his horse.

"Now, my brave fellows," shouted I, in a loud voice, "we must take it cavalry fashion—Mexican cavalry, I mean." The men laughed.

"Once in the wood, we shall retreat no further. At the words '*Mount and follow*,' spring to your seats and follow Mr. Clayley. I shall look to your rear—don't stop to fire—hold on well. If any one fall, let his nearest comrade take him up. Ha! any one hurt there?" A shot had whistled through the ranks. "Only a scratch," was the reply.

"All ready, then, are you? Now, Mr. Clayley, you see the high timber—make direct for that. Down with the bars! '*Mount and follow!*'"

As I uttered the last words, the men leaped to their seats; and Clayley, riding the bell-mule, dashed out of the corral, followed by the whole train, some of them plunging and kicking, but all galloping forward at the sound of the bell upon their guide.

As the dark cavalcade rushed out upon the prairie, a wild cry from the guerrilleros told that this was the first intimation they had had of the singular *ruse*. They sprung to their saddles with yells, and galloped in pursuit. The howitzer, that had been trailed upon the corral, was suddenly wheeled about and fired; but the shot, ill-directed in their haste, whistled harmlessly over our heads.

The guerrilleros, on their swift steeds, soon lessened the distance between us.

With a dozen of the best men I hung in the rear, to give the foremost of the pursuers a volley, or pick up any soldier who might be tossed from his mule. One of these, at intervals, kicked as only a Mexican mule can; and, when within five hundred yards of the timber, his rider, an Irishman, was flung upon the prairie.

The rearmost of our party stopped to take him up. He was seized by Chane, who mounted him in front of himself. The delay had nearly been fatal. The pursuers were already within a hundred yards, firing their pistols and escoptes, without effect. A number of the men turned in their seats and blazed back. Others threw their rifles over their shoulders and pulled trigger at random. I could perceive that two or three guerrilleros dropped from their saddles. Their comrades, with shouts of vengeance, closed upon us nearer and nearer. The long lazoos, far in advance, whistled around our heads.

I felt the slippery noose light upon my shoulders. I flung out my arms to throw it off, but with a sudden jerk it tightened around my neck. I clutched the hard thong, and pulled with all my might. It was in vain. The animal I rode, freed from my *maney*, seemed to plunge under me, and gather up its back with a vicious determination to fling me. It succeeded; and I was launched in the air, and dashed to the earth with a stunning violence.

I felt myself dragged along the gravelly ground. I grasped the weeds, but they came away in my hands, torn up by the roots. There was a struggle above and around me. I could hear loud shouts and the firing of guns. I felt that I was being strangled.

A bright object glistened before my eyes. I felt myself seized by a strong, rough hand, and swung into the air, and rudely shaken, as if in the grasp of some giant's arm.

Something switched me sharply over the cheeks. I heard the rustling of trees. Branches snapped and crackled, and leaves swept across my face. Then came the flash—flash, and the crack—crack—crack, of a dozen rifles, and under their blazing light I was dashed a second time with violence to the earth.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RESCUE.

"ROUGH handlin', cap'n. Yer must excuse haste."

It was the voice of Lincoln.

"Ha! in the timber? Safe, then!" ejaculated I, in return.

"Two or three wounded—not bad neither. Chane has got a stab in the hip—he gi'n the feller goss for it. Let me louze the darned thing off o' your neck. It kum mighty near chokin' yer, cap'n."

Bob proceeded to unwind the noose end of a lasso, that, with some six feet of a raw hide thong, was still tightly fastened around my neck.

"But who cut the rope?" demanded I.

"I did, with this hyur toothpick. Yer see, cap'n, it warn't yer time to be hung just yet."

I could not help smiling as I thanked the hunter for my safety.

"But where are the guerrilleros?" asked I, looking around, my brain still somewhat confused.

"Yander they are, keepin' safe out o' range o' this long gun. Just listen to 'em!—what a hilloa!"

The Mexican horsemen were galloping out on the prairie, their arms glistening under the clear moonlight.

"Take to the trees, men!" cried I, seeing that the enemy had again unlimbered, and were preparing to discharge their howitzer.

In a moment the iron shower came whizzing through the branches, without doing any injury, as each of the men had covered his body with a tree. Several of the mules that stood tied and trembling were killed by the discharge.

Another shower hurtled through the bushes, with a similar effect.

I was thinking of retreating further into the timber, and was walking back to reconnoiter the ground, when my eye fell upon an object that arrested my attention. It was the body of a very large man, lying flat upon his face, his head buried among the roots of a good-sized tree. The arms were stiffly pressed against his sides, and the legs projected at full stretch, exhibiting an appearance of motionless rigidity,

as though a well-dressed corpse had been rolled over on its face. I at once recognized it as the body of the major, whom I supposed to have fallen dead where he lay.

"Good Heavens! Clayley, look here!" cried I; "poor Blossom's killed!"

"No, I'll be hanged if I am!" growled the latter, screwing his neck round like a lizard, and looking up without changing the attitude of his body. Clayley was convulsed with laughter. The major sheathed his head again, as he knew that another shot from the howitzer might soon be expected.

"Major," cried Clayley, "that right shoulder of yours projects over at least six inches."

"I know it," answered the major, in a frightened voice. "Curse the tree!—it's hardly big enough to cover a squirrel;" and he squatted closer to the earth, pressing his arms tighter against his sides. His whole attitude was so ludicrous that Clayley burst into a second yell of laughter. At this moment a wild shout was heard from the guerrilleros.

"What next?" cried I, running toward the front, and looking out upon the prairie.

"Them wild-cats are gwine to clear out, cap'n," said Lincoln, meeting me. "I kin see them bitebin' up."

"It is as you say! What can be the reason?"

A strange commotion was visible in the group of horsemen. Scouts were galloping across the plain to a point of the woods about half-a-mile distant, and I could see the artillerymen fastening their mules to the howitzer-carriage. Suddenly a bugle rung out, sounding the 'recall,' and the guerrilleros, spurring their horses, galloped off toward Medellin.

A loud cheer, such as was never uttered by Mexican throats, came from the opposite edge of the prairie; and looking in that direction, I beheld a long line of dark forms debouching from the woods at a gallop. Their sparkling blades, as they issued from the dark forest, glistened like a cordon of fireflies, and I recognized the heavy footfall of the American horse. A cheer from my men attracted their attention; and the leader of the dragoons, seeing that the guerrilleros had got far out of reach, wheeled his column to the right, and came galloping down.

"Is that Colonel Rawley?" inquired I, recognizing a dragoon officer.

"Why, bless my soul, H——!" exclaimed he, "how did you get out? We heard you were juggled. All alive yet?"

"We have lost two," I replied.

"Pah! that's nothing. I came out expecting to bury the whole kit of you. Here's Clayley too. Clayley, your friend Twing's with us; you'll find him in the rear."

"Ha! Clayley, old boy!" cried Twing, coming up; "no bones broken? all right? take a pull; do you good—don't drink it all, though—leave a thimbleful for Haller there. How do you like that?"

"Delicious, by Jove!" ejaculated Clayley, tugging away at the Georgia major's flask.

"Come, captain, try it."

"Thank you," I replied, eagerly grasping the welcome flask.

"But where is Old Bloss? killed, wounded, or missing?"

"I believe the major is not far off, and still unhurt."

I dispatched a man for the major, who presently came up, blowing and swearing like a Flanders trooper.

"Hilloa, Bloss!" shouted Twing, grasping him by the hand.

"Why, bless me, Twing! I'm glad to see you," answered Blossom, throwing his arms around the diminutive major. "But where on earth is your pewter?" for during the embrace he had been groping all over Twing's body for the flask!

"Here, Cudjoi! that flask, boy!"

"Faith, Twing, I'm near choked; we've been fighting all day—a devil of a fight. I chased a whole squad of the cursed scoundrels on Hercules, and came within a squirrel's jump of riding right into their nest. We've killed dozens; but Haller will tell you all. He's a good fellow, that Haller; but he's too rash—rash as blazes. Hilloa, Hercules! glad to see you again, old fellow; you had a sharp brush for it."

"Remember your promise, major," said I, as the major stood patting Hercules upon the shoulder.

"I'll do better, captain. I'll give you a choice between Hercules and a splendid black I have. Faith! it's hard to part with you, old Herky, but I know the captain will like the black better; he's the handsomest horse in the whole army; bought him from poor Ridgely, who was killed at Monterey."

This speech of the major was delivered partly in soliloquy, partly in an apostrophe to Hercules, and partly to myself.

"Very well, major," I replied. "I'll take the black. Mr. Clayley, mount the men on their mules; you will take command of the company, and proceed with Colonel Rawley to camp. I shall go myself for the Don."

The last was said in a whisper to Clayley.

"We may not get in before noon to-morrow."

Say nothing of my absence to any one. I shall make my report at noon to-morrow."

"And, captain—" said Clayley.

"Well, Clayley?"

"You will carry back my—"

"What? To which, friend?"

"Of course, to Mary of the Light."

"Oh, certainly!"

"In your best Spanish?"

"Rest assured," said I, smiling at the earnestness of my friend.

I was about moving from the spot, when the thought occurred to me to send the company to camp under command of Oakes, and take Clayley along with me.

"Clayley, by the way," said I, calling the lieutenant back, "I don't see why you may not carry your compliments in person. Oakes can take the men back. I shall borrow half-a-dozen dragoons from Rawley."

"With all my heart," replied Clayley.

"Come, then; get a horse, and let us be off."

Taking Lincoln and Raoul, with half-a-dozen of Rawley's dragoons, I bade my friends good-night.

These started for camp by the road of Mata Cordera, while I with my little party brushed for some distance round the border of the prairie, and then climbed the hill, over which lay the path to the house of the Spaniard.

As I reached the top of the ridge, I turned to look upon the scene of our late skirmish.

The cold round moon, looking down upon the prairie of La Virgen, saw none of the victims of the fight.

The guerrilleros in their retreat had carried off their dead and wounded comrades, and the Americans slept underground in the lone corral; but I could not help fancying that the gaunt wolves were skulking round the inclosure, and that the claws of the coyote were already tearing up the red earth that had been hurriedly heaped over their graves.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE COCUYO.

A NIGHT-RIDE through the golden tropical forest, when the moon is bathing its broad and wax-like frondage—when the winds are hushed and the long leaves hang drooping and silent—when the path conducts through dark aisles and arbors of green vine leaves, and out again into bright and flowery glades—is one of those luxuries that I wish we could obtain without going beyond the limits of our own land.

The cocuyo lights your way through the dark aisles, and the nightingale cheers you with his varied and mimic song. A thousand sights and sounds, that seem to be possessed of some mysterious and narcotic power, lull you into silence and sleep—a sleep whose dream is love.

Clayley and I felt this as we rode silently along. Even the ruder hearts of our companions seemed touched by the same influence.

We entered the dark woods that fringed the arroyo, and the stream was crossed in silence. Raoul rode in advance, acting as guide.

The stillness of the night was broken only by the heavy hoof bounding back from the hard turf, the jingling of spurs, or the ringing of the iron scabbard as it struck against the moving flanks of our horses.

We had crossed the sandy spur, with its chaparral of cactus and mesquite, and were entering a gorge of heavy timber, when the practiced eye of Lincoln detected an object in the dark shadow of the woods, and communicated the fact to me.

"Halt!" cried I, in a low voice.

The party reined up at the order. A rustling was heard in the bushes ahead.

"*Quien viva?*" challenged Raoul, in the advance.

"*Un amigo*," (a friend) was the response.

I sprang forward to the side of Raoul, and called out:

"*Acercate! acercate!*" (come near!)

A figure moved out of the bushes and approached.

"*Esta el capitán?*" (Is it the captain?)

I recognized the guide given me by Don Cosme.

The Mexican approached and banded me a small piece of paper. I rode into an opening, and held it up to the moonlight; but the writing was in pencil, and I could not make out a single letter.

"Try this, Clayley. Perhaps your eyes are better than mine."

"No," said Clayley, after examining the paper. "I can hardly see the writing upon it."

"*Esperate, mi amo*" (wait, my master), said the guide, making me a sign. We remained motionless.

The Mexican took from his head his heavy sombrero, and stepped into a darker recess of the forest. After standing for a moment, hat in hand, a brilliant object shot out from the leaves of the *palma redonda*. It was the cocuyo—the great firefly of the tropics. With a low humming sound it came glistening along at a height of seven or eight feet from the ground. The man sprang up, and with a sweep of his arm jerked it suddenly to the earth. Then, covering it with his hat, and inverting his

hand, he caught the gleaming insect and presented it to me with the ejaculation:

"Ya!"—(Now!)

"No muerde," (it does not bite), added he, as he saw that I hesitated to touch the strange, beetle-shaped insect.

I took the cocuyo in my hand, the green, golden fire flashing from its great round eyes. I held it up before the writing, but the faint glimmer was scarcely discernible upon the paper.

"Why, it would require a dozen of these to make sufficient light," I said to the guide.

"No, señor; uno basta—asi" (no, sir; one is enough—thus—); and the Mexican, taking the cocuyo in his fingers, pressed it gently against the surface of the paper. It produced a brilliant light, radiating over a circle of several inches in diameter!

Every point in the writing was plainly visible.

I bent my head to the paper, and read in Spanish:

"I have made known your situation to the American commander!"

There was no signature nor other mark upon the paper.

"From Don Cosme?" I inquired, in a whisper to the Mexican.

"Yes, señor," was the reply.

"And how did you expect to reach us in the corral?"

"Asi," (so), said the man, holding up a shaggy bull's hide, which he carried over his arm.

"We have friends here, Clayley. Come, my good fellow, take this!" and I handed a gold eagle to the peon.

"Forward!"

The tinkling of canteens, the jingling of sabers, and the echo of bounding hoofs, recommenced. We were again in motion, filing on through the shadowy woods.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LUPE AND LUZ.

SHORTLY after, we debouched from the forest, entering the open fields of Don Cosme's plantation.

The guide pointed to one of the guardarayas that led to the house. We struck into it, and rode forward. The path was pictured by the moonbeams, as they glanced through the half-shadowing leaves. A wild roe bounded away before us, brushing his soft flanks against the rustling thorns of the mezquite.

Further on we reached the grounds, and, halting behind the jessamines, dismounted. Clayley and myself entered the inclosure.

As we pushed through a copse we were saluted by the hoarse bark of a couple of mastiffs; and we could perceive several forms moving in front of the rancho. We stopped a moment to observe them.

The dogs were secured by several domestics, and we advanced.

"Quien es?" inquired Don Cosme.

"Amigos," (friends) I replied.

"Papa! papa! es el capitán?" (papa, it is the captain!) cried one of the sisters, who had run out in advance, and whom I recognized as the elder one.

"Do not be alarmed, señorita," said I, approaching.

"Oh! you are safe—you are safe!—papa, he is safe!" cried both the girls at once; while Don Cosme exhibited his joy by hugging my comrade and myself alternately.

Suddenly letting go, he threw up his hands, and inquired with a look of anxiety—

"Y el señor gordo?" (And the fat gentleman?)

"Oh! he's all right," replied Clayley, with a laugh; "he has saved his bacon, Don Cosme; though I imagine about this time he wouldn't object to a little of yours."

I translated my companion's answer. The latter part of it seemed to act upon Don Cosme as a hint, and we were immediately hurried to the dining-room, where we found the Dona Joaquina preparing supper.

During our meal I recounted the principal events of the day. Don Cosme knew nothing of these guerrilleros, although he had heard that there were bands in the neighborhood. Learning from the guide that we had been attacked, he had dispatched a trusty servant to the American camp, and Raoul had met the party coming to our rescue.

After supper Don Cosme left us to give some orders relative to his departure in the morning. His lady set about preparing the sleeping apartments, and my companion and I were left for several hours in the sweet companionship of Lupe and Luz.

Both were exquisite musicians, playing the harp and guitar with equal cleverness. Many a pure Spanish melody was poured into the delighted ears of my friend and myself. The thoughts that arose in our minds were doubtless of a similar kind; and yet how strange that our hearts should have been warmed to love by beings so different in character! The gay, free spirit of my comrade seemed to have met a responsive echo. He and his brilliant partner laughed, chatted and sung in turns. In the incidents of the moment this light-hearted creature had forgotten her brother, yet the next

moment she would weep for him. A tender heart—a heart of joys and sorrows—of ever-changing emotions, coming and passing like shadows thrown by straggling clouds upon the sun-lit stream!

Unlike was our converse—more serious. We may not laugh, lest we should profane the holy sentiment that was stealing upon us. There is no mirth in love. There are joy, pleasure, luxury; but laughter finds no echo in the heart that loves. Love is a feeling of anxiety—of expectation. The harp is set aside. The guitar lies untouched for a sweeter music—the music that vibrates from the strings of the heart. Are our eyes not held together by some invisible chain? Are not our souls in communion through some mysterious means? It is not language—at least, not the language of words, for we are conversing upon indifferent things—not indifferent, either. Narcisso, Narcisso—a theme fraternal. His peril casts a cloud over our happiness.

"Oh! that he were here—then we could be happy indeed."

"He will return; fear not—grieve not; tomorrow your father will easily find him. I shall leave no means untried to restore him to so fond a sister."

"Thanks! thanks! Oh! we are already indebted to you so much."

Are those eyes swimming with love, or gratitude, or both at once? Surely gratitude alone does not speak so wildly. Could this scene not last forever?

"Good-night—good night!"

"Senores, pasan Vds. buena noche!" (Gentlemen, may you pass a pleasant night!)

We were shown to our sleeping apartments. Our men picketed their horses under the olives, and slept in the bamboo rancho, a single sentry walking his rounds during the night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TOUGH NIGHT OF IT AFTER ALL.

I HAD not slept in a bed for two months. A close crib in a transport ship—a "shake-down" among the scorpions and spiders of Lobos—a single blanket among the sand-hills, where it was not unusual to wake up half buried by the drift.

These were my *souvenirs*. Fancy the prospect! It certainly invited repose; and yet I was in no humor to sleep. My brain was in a whirl. The strange incidents of the day—some of them were mysterious—crowded into my mind. My whole system, mental as well as physical, was flushed; and thought followed thought with nervous rapidity.

My heart shared the excitement—chords long silent had been touched—the divine element was fairly enthroned. I was in love!

It was not the first passion of my life, and I easily recognized it. Even jealousy had begun to distill its poison—"Don Santiago!"

I was standing in front of a large mirror, when I noticed two small miniatures hanging against the wall—one on each side of the glass.

I bent over to examine, first, that which hung upon the right. I gazed with emotion. They were her features; "And yet," thought I, "the painter has not flattered her; it might better represent her ten years hence; still the likeness is there. Stupid artist!" I turned to the other. "Her fair sister, no doubt. Gracious heaven! Do my eyes deceive me? No, the black wavy hair—the arching brows—the sinister lip—*Dubrose!*"

A sharp pang shot through my heart. I looked at the picture again and again, with a kind of incredulous bewilderment; but every fresh examination only strengthened conviction. "There is no mistaking those features—they are his!" Paralyzed with the shock, I sunk into a chair, my heart filled with the most painful emotions.

For some moments I was unable to think, much less to act.

"What can it mean? Is this accomplished villain a fiend?—the fiend of my existence?—thus to cross me at every point, perhaps in the end to—"

Our mutual dislike at first meeting—Lobos—his reappearance upon the sand-hills—the mystery of his passing the lines, and again appearing with the guerrilla—all came forcibly upon my recollection; and now—I seized the lamp, and rushed back to the pictures.

"Yes, I am not mistaken: it is he—it is she, her features—all—all. And thus, too!—the position—side by side—counterparts! There are no others on the wall; matched—mated—perhaps betrothed! His name, too, Don Emilio! The American who taught them English! His is Emile—the voice on the island cried 'Emile!' Oh! the coincidence is complete! This villain, handsome and accomplished as he is, has been here before me! Betrothed—perhaps married—perhaps—Torture! horrible!"

I reeled back to my chair, dashing the lamp recklessly upon the table. I know not how long I sat, but a world of wintry thoughts passed through my heart and brain. A clock, striking from a large picture, awoke me from my reverie. I did not count the hours. Music began to play behind the picture. It was a sad,

sweet air, that chimed with my feelings, and to some extent soothed them. I rose at length, and hastily undressing, threw myself upon the bed, mentally resolving to forget all—to forget that I had ever seen her.

"I will rise early—return to camp without meeting her; and once there, my duties will drive away this painful fancy. The drum and the fire and the roar of the cannon will drown remembrance. Ha! it was only a passing thought at best—the hallucination of a moment. I shall easily get rid of it. Ha! ha!"

I laid my fevered cheek upon the soft, cold pillow. I felt composed—almost happy.

"A Creole of New Orleans! How could he have been here? Oh! have I not the explanation already? Why should I dwell on it?"

A jealous heart—it is easy to say "forget."

I tried to prevent my thoughts from returning to this theme. I directed them to a thousand things; to the ships—to the landing—to the army—to the soldiers—to the buttons upon their jackets and the swabs upon their shoulders—to everything I could think of; all in vain. Back, back, back! in painful throes it came, and my heart throbbed, and my brain burned with bitter memories freshly awakened.

I turned and tossed upon my couch for many a long hour. The clock in the picture struck and played the same music again and again, still soothing me as before. Even despair has its moments of respite; and worn with fatigue, mental as well as physical, I listened to the sad, sweet strain, until it died away into my dreams.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LIGHT AFTER THE SHADE.

WHEN I awoke, all was darkness around me. I threw out my arms and opened the damask curtains. Not a ray of light entered the room. I felt refreshed, and from this I concluded I must have slept long. I slipped out upon the floor and commenced groping for my watch. Some one knocked.

"Come in!" I called.

The door opened, and a flood of light gushed into the apartment. It was a servant bearing a lamp.

"What is the hour?" I demanded.

"Nine o'clock, *mi amo*" (my master), was the reply.

The servant set down the lamp and went out. Another immediately entered, carrying a salver with a small gold cup.

"What have you there?"

"Chocolate, master; Dona Joaquina has sent it."

I drank off the beverage, and hastened to dress myself. I was reflecting whether I should pass on to camp without seeing any one of the family. Somehow, my heart felt less heavy. I believe the morning always brings relief to pain, either mental or bodily. It seems to be a law of nature—at least, so my experience tells me. The morning air, buoyant and balmy, dulls the edge of anguish. New hopes arise, and new projects appear with the sun. The invalid, couch-tossing through the long watches of the night, will acknowledge this truth.

I did not approach the mirror. I dared not.

"I will not look upon the loved, the hated face—no, on to the camp!—let Lethe—Has my friend arisen?"

"Yes, master; he has been up for hours."

"Ha! where is he?"

"In the garden, master."

"Alone?"

"No, master; he is with the *ninas*."

"Happy, light-hearted Clayley! No jealous thoughts to torture him!" mused I, as I buckled on my stock.

"Tell my friend, when he returns to the house, that I wish to see him."

"Yes, master."

The servant bowed and left the room.

In a few minutes Clayley made his appearance, gay as a grasshopper.

"So, good lieutenant, you have been improving your time, I hear?"

"Haven't I, though? Such a delicious stroll! Haller, this is a paradise."

"Where have you been?"

"Feeding the swans," replied Clayley, with a laugh. "But, by-the-way, your *chere amie* hangs her pretty head this morning. She seems hurt that you have not been up. She kept constantly looking toward the house."

"Clayley, will you do me the favor to order the men to their saddles?"

"What! going so soon? Not before breakfast, though?"

"In five minutes."

"Why, captain, what's the matter? And such a breakfast as they are getting! Oh! Don Cosme will not hear of it."

"Don Cosme—"

Our host entered at this moment; and, listening to his remonstrances, the order was rescinded, and I consented to remain.

I saluted the ladies with as much courtesy as I could assume. I could not help the coldness of my manner, and I could perceive that with her it did not pass unobserved.

We sat down to the breakfast-table; but my heart was full of bitterness, and I scarcely

touched the delicate viands that were placed before me.

"You do not eat, capitán. I hope you are well," said Don Cosme, observing my strange and somewhat rude demeanor.

"Thank you, señor. I never enjoyed better health."

I studiously avoided looking toward her, paying slight attentions to her sister. This is the game of piques. Once or twice I ventured a side-glance. Her eyes were bent upon me with a strange, inquiring look.

They are swimming in tears, and soft, and forgiving. They are swollen. She has been weeping. That is not strange. Her brother's danger is, no doubt, the cause of her sorrow.

Yet, is there not reproach in her looks? Reproach! How ill does my conduct of last night correspond with this affected coldness—this rudeness! Can she too be suffering?

I arose from the table, and, walking forth, ordered Lincoln to prepare the men for marching.

I strolled down among the orange-trees. Clayley followed soon after, accompanied by both girls. Don Cosme remained at the house to superintend the saddling of his mule, while Dona Joaquina was packing the necessary articles into his portmanteau.

Following some silent instinct, we—Guadalupe and I—came together. Clayley and his mistress had strayed away, leaving us alone. I had not yet spoken to her. I felt a strange impulse—a desire to know the worst. I felt as one looking over a fearful precipice.

Then I will brave the danger; it can be no worse than this agony of suspicion and suspense.

I turned toward her. Her head was bent to one side. She was crushing an orange-flower between her fingers, and her eyes seemed to follow the dropping fragments.

How beautiful was she at that moment!

"The artist certainly has not flattered you."

She looked at me with a bewildered expression. Oh! those swimming eyes!

She did not understand me.

I repeated the observation.

"Señor capitán, what do you mean?"

"That the painter has not done you justice. The portrait is certainly a likeness, yet the expression, I think, should have been younger."

"The painter! What painter? The portrait! What portrait, señor?"

"I refer to your portrait, which I accidentally found hanging in my apartment."

"Ah! by the mirror?"

"Yes, by the mirror," I answered sullenly.

"But it is not mine, señor capitán."

"Ha!—how? Not yours?"

"No; it is the portrait of my cousin, Maria de Merced. They say we were much alike."

My heart expanded. My whole frame quivered under the influence of joyful emotions.

"And the gentleman?" I faltered out.

"Don Emilio! He was cousin's lover—*huyeron*." (They eloped.)

As she repeated the last word, she turned her head away, and I thought there was a sadness in her manner.

I was about to speak, when she continued—

"It was her room—we have not touched anything."

"And where is your cousin, now?"

"We know not."

"There is a mystery," thought I. I pressed the subject no further. It was nothing to me now. My heart was happy.

"Let us walk further, Lupita."

We reached a clump of cocoa-trees; one of them had fallen, and its smooth trunk offered a seat, protected from the sun by the shadowy leaves of its fellows. On this we sat down. There was no resistance—no reasoning process—no calculation of advantages and chances, such as is too often mingled with the noble passion of love. We felt nothing of this—nothing but that undefinable impulse which had entered our hearts, and to whose mystical power neither of us dreamed of offering opposition. Delay and duty were alike forgotten.

"I shall ask the question now—I shall know my fate at once," were my thoughts.

In the changing scenes of a soldier's life there is but little time for the slow formalities, the zealous vigils, the complicated *finesse* of courtship. Perhaps this consideration impelled me. I have but little confidence in the cold heart that is won by a series of assiduities. There is too much calculation of after events—too much selfishness.

These reflections passed through my mind. I bent toward my companion, and whispered to her in that language—rich above all others in the vocabulary of the heart:

"*Guadalupe, tu me amas?*" (Guadalupe, do you love me?)

"*Yo te amo!*" was the simple reply. Need I describe the joyful feelings that filled my heart at that moment? My happiness was complete.

The confession rendered her sacred in my eyes; and we sat for some time silent, enjoying that transport only known to those who have truly, purely loved.

The trampling of hoofs! It was Clayley at the head of the troop. They were mounted,

and waiting for me. Don Cosme was impatient; so was Dona Joaquina. I could not blame them, knowing the cause.

"Ride forward! I shall follow presently."

The horsemen filed off into the fields, headed by the lieutenant, beside whom rode Don Cosme, on his white mule.

"You will soon return, Enrique?"

"I shall lose no opportunity of seeing you. I shall long for the hour more than you, I fear."

"Oh! no, no!"

"Believe me yes, Lupita! Say again you will never cease to love me."

"Never, never! Yours—yours—till death!"

I sprang into the saddle. A parting look—another from a distance—a wave of the hand—and the next moment I was urging my horse in full gallop under the shadowy palms.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DISAPPOINTMENT AND A NEW PLAN.

I OVERTOOK my companions as they were entering the woods. Clayley, who had been looking back from time to time, brushed alongside, as if wishing to enter into conversation.

"Hard work, captain, to leave such quarters. By Jove! I could have stayed forever."

"Come, Clayley—you are in love."

"Yes; they who live in glass houses—Oh! if I could only speak the lingo as you do!"

I could not help smiling, for I had overheard him through the trees making the most he could of his partner's broken English. I was curious to know how he had sped, and whether he had been as "quick upon the trigger" as myself. My curiosity was soon relieved.

"I tell you, captain," he continued, "if I could only have talked it, I would have put the question on the spot. I did try to get a 'yes' or 'no' out of her; but she either couldn't or wouldn't understand me. It was all bad luck."

"Could you not make her understand you? Surely she knows English enough for that?"

"I thought so too; but when I spoke about love, she only laughed and slapped me on the face with her fan. Oh, no; the thing must be done in Spanish, that's plain; and you see I am going to set about it in earnest. She loaned me these."

Saying this, he pulled out of the crown of his foraging-cap a couple of small volumes, which I recognized as a Spanish grammar and dictionary. I could not resist laughing aloud.

"Comrade, you will find the best dictionary to be the lady herself."

"That's true; but how the deuce are we to get back again? A mule-hunt don't happen every day."

"I fancy there will be some difficulty in it."

I had already thought of this. It was no easy matter to steal away from camp—one's brother-officers are so solicitous about your appearance at drills and parades. Don Cosme's rancho was at least ten miles from the lines, and the road would not be the safest for the solitary lover.

The prospect of frequent returns was not at all flattering.

"Can't we steal out at night?" suggested Clayley. "I think we might mount half-a-dozen of our fellows and do it snugly. What do you say, captain?"

"Clayley, I cannot return without this brother. I have almost given my word to that effect."

"You have? That is bad! I fear there is no prospect of getting him out as you propose."

My companion's prophetic foreboding proved but too correct; for on nearing the camp we were met by an aid-de-camp of the commander-in-chief, who informed me that, on that very morning, all communication between the foreign ships of war and the besieged city had been prohibited.

Don Cosme's journey, then, would be in vain. I explained this, advising him to return to his family.

"Do not make it known—say that some time is required, and you have left the matter in my hands. Be assured I shall be among the first to enter the city, and I shall find the boy and bring him to his mother in safety."

This was the only consolation I could offer.

"You are kind, captain—very kind; but I know that nothing can now be done. We can only hope and pray."

The old man had dropped into a bent attitude, his countenance marked by the deepest melancholy.

Taking the Frenchman, Raoul, along with me, I rode back until I had placed him beyond the danger of the straggling plunderer, when we shook hands and parted. As he left me, I turned to look after him. He still sat in that attitude that betokens deep dejection, his shoulders bent forward over the neck of his mule, while he gazed vacantly on the path. My heart sunk at the spectacle, and, sad and dispirited, I rode at a lagging pace toward the camp.

Not a shot had as yet been fired against the town, but our batteries were nearly perfected, and several mortars were mounted and ready to fling in their deadly missiles. I knew that every shot and shell would carry death into the devoted city, for there was not a point within its walls out of range of a ten-inch howitzer.

Women and children must perish along with armed soldiers; and the boy—he too might be a victim. Would this be the tidings I should have to carry to his home? And how should I be received by her with such a tale upon my lips? Already had I sent back a sorrowing father.

"Is there no way to save him, Raoul?"

"Captain?" inquired the man, starting at the vehemence of my manner.

A sudden thought had occurred to me.

"Are you well acquainted with Vera Cruz?"

"I know every street, captain."

"Where do those arches lead that open from the sea? There is one on each side of the mole."

I had observed these when visiting a friend—an officer of the navy—on board his ship.

"They are conductors, captain, to carry off the overflow of the sea after a norther; they lead under the city, opening at various places. I have had the pleasure of passing through them."

"Ha! how?"

"On a little smuggling expedition."

"It is possible, then, to reach the town by these?"

"Nothing easier—unless they may have a guard at the mouth; but that is not likely. They would not dream of any one's making the attempt."

"How would you like to make it?"

"If the captain wishes it, I will bring him a bottle of *eau-de-vie* from the Cafe de Santa Anna."

"I do not wish you to go alone. I would accompany you."

"Think of it, captain; there is risk for you in such an undertaking. I may go safely. No one knows that I have joined you, I believe. If you are taken—"

"Yes, yes. I know well the result."

"The risk is not great either," continued the Frenchman, in a half soliloquy. "Disguised as Mexicans, we might do it—you speak the language as well as I do. If you wish it, captain—"

"I do."

"I am ready then."

I knew the fellow well; one of those dare-devil spirits, ready for anything that promised adventure—a child of fortune—a stray waif tumbling about upon the waves of chance—gifted with head and heart of no common order—ignorant of books, yet educated in experience. There was a dash of the heroic in his character that had won my admiration, and I was fond of his company.

It was a desperate adventure. I knew that; but I felt stronger interest than common in the fate of this boy. My own future fate, too, was in a great degree connected with his safety. There was something in the very danger that lured me on to tempt it. I felt that it would be adding another chapter to a life which I have termed "adventurous."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FOOLHARDY ADVENTURE.

AT night Raoul and I, disguised in the leathern dresses of two rancheros, stole round the lines and reached Punta Hornos, a point beyond our own pickets.

Here we "took the water," wading waist-deep. This was about ten o'clock. The tide was just setting out, and the night, by good-fortune, was as dark as pitch.

As the swell rolled in we were buried to the neck; and when it rolled back again we bent forward, so that at no time could much of our bodies be seen above the surface.

In this manner, half-wading, half-swimming, we kept up to the town.

It was a toilsome journey, but the water was warm, and the sand on the bottom firm and level. We were strengthened—I at least—by hope and the knowledge of danger. Doubtless my companion felt the latter stimulant as much as I.

We soon reached the battlements of Santiago, where we proceeded with increased caution. We could see the sentry up against the sky, pacing along the parapet. His shrill cry startled us. We thought we had been discovered. The darkness alone prevented this. At length we passed him and came opposite the city, whose battlements rested upon the water's edge. The tide was at ebb, and a bed of black weed-covered rocks lay between the sea and the bastion. We approached these with caution; and, crawling over the slippery boulders, after a hundred yards or so found ourselves in the entrance of one of the conductors. Here we halted to rest ourselves, sitting down upon a ledge of rock. We were in no more danger here than in our own tents; yet within twenty feet were men who, had they known our proximity, would have strung us up like a pair of dogs. But our danger was far from lying at this end of the adventure. After a rest of half an hour we kept up into the conductor. My companion seemed perfectly at home in this subterranean passage, walking along as boldly as if it had been brilliantly lighted with gas!

After proceeding some distance we ap-

proached a grating, where a light shot in from above.

"Can we pass out here?" I inquired.

"Not yet, captain," answered Raoul, in a whisper. "Further on."

We passed the grating, then another, and another, and at length reached one where only a feeble ray struggled downward through the bars. Here my guide stopped and listened attentively for several minutes. Then stretching out his hand, he undid the fastening of the grate and silently turned it upon its hinge. He next swung himself up, until his head projected above-ground. In this position he again listened, looking cautiously on all sides. Satisfied at length that there was no one near, he drew his body up through the grating and disappeared. After a short interval, he returned, and called down:

"Come, captain!"

I swung myself up to the street. Raoul shut down the trap with care.

"Take marks, captain!" whispered he; "we may get separated."

It was a dismal suburb. No living thing was apparent, with the exception of a gang of prowling dogs, lean and savage, as all dogs are during a siege. An image, decked in all the glare of gaud and tinsel, looked out of a glazed niche in the opposite wall. A dim lamp burned at its feet, showing to the charitable a receptacle for their offerings. A quaint old steeple loomed in the darkness overhead.

"What church?" I asked Raoul.

"La Magdalena."

"That will do. Now onward."

"Buenas noches, señor!" said Raoul to a soldier who passed us, wrapped in his great-coat.

"Buenas noches!" returned the man in a gruff voice.

We stole cautiously along the streets, keeping in the darker ones to avoid observation. The citizens were mostly in their beds; but groups of soldiers were straggling about, and patrols met us at every corner.

It became necessary to pass through one of the streets that was brilliantly lighted. When about half-way up it a fellow came swinging along, and, noticing our strange appearance, stopped and looked after us. Our dresses, as I have said, were of leather. Our calzoneros, as well as jackets, were shining with the seawater, and dripping upon the pavement at every step.

Before we could walk beyond reach, the man shouted out—

"*Careño! caballeros*, why don't you strip before entering the *bano*?"

"What is it?" cried a soldier, coming up and stopping us.

A group of his comrades joined him, and we were hurried into the light.

"*Mil diablos!*" exclaimed one of the soldiers, recognizing Raoul; "our old friend the Frenchman! *Parlez vous Français, monsieur?*"

"Spies!" cried another.

"Arrest them!" shouted a sergeant of the guard, at the moment coming up with a patrol, and we were both jumped upon and held by about a dozen men.

In vain Raoul protested our innocence, declaring that we were only two poor fishermen, who had wet our clothes in drawing the nets.

"It's not a fisherman's costume, monsieur," said one.

"Fishermen don't usually wear diamonds on their knuckles," cried another, snatching a ring from my finger.

On this ring, inside the circlet, were engraven my name and rank!

Several men, now coming forward, recognized Raoul, and stated, moreover, that he had been missing for some days.

"He must, therefore," said they, "have been with the Yankees."

We were soon handcuffed and marched off to the guard-prison. There we were closely searched, but nothing further was found, except my purse, containing several gold eagles—an American coin that of itself would have been sufficient evidence to condemn me.

We were now heavily chained to each other, after which the guard left us to our thoughts. They could not have left us in much less agreeable companionship.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HELP FROM HEAVEN.

"I WOULD not care a *claco* for my own life," said Raoul, as the gate closed upon us, "but that you, captain—*helas! hélas!*" and the Frenchman groaned and sunk upon the stone bench, dragging me down also.

I could offer no consolation. I knew that we should be tried as spies; and, if convicted—a result almost certain—we had not twenty hours to live. The thought that I had brought this brave fellow to such a fate enhanced the misery of my situation. To die thus ingloriously was bitter indeed. Three days ago I could have spent my life recklessly; but now, how changed were my feelings! I had found something worth living to enjoy; and to think I should never again—"Oh! I have become a coward!" I cursed my rashness bitterly.

We passed the night in vain attempts at mutual consolation. Even our present sufferings occupied us. Our clothes were wet through, and the night had become piercingly cold. Our bed was a bench of stone; and upon this we lay as our chains would allow us, sleeping close together to generate warmth. It was to us a miserable night; but morning came at last, and at an early hour we were examined by the officer of the guard.

Our court-martial was fixed for the afternoon, and before this tribunal we were carried amidst the jeers of the populace. We told our story, giving the name of the boy Narcisso, and the house where he was lodged. This was verified by the court, but declared to be a *ruse* invented by my comrade—whose knowledge of the place and other circumstances rendered the thing probable enough. Raoul, moreover, was identified by many of the citizens, who proved his disappearance coincident with the landing of the American expedition. Besides, my ring and purse were sufficient of themselves to condemn us—and condemned we were. We were to be *garroted* on the following morning!

Raoul was offered life if he would turn traitor and give information of the enemy. The brave soldier indignantly spurned the offer. It was extended to me, with a similar result.

All at once I observed a strange commotion among the people. Citizens and soldiers rushed from the hall, and the court, hastily pronouncing our sentence, ordered us to be carried away. We were seized by the guard, pulled into the street, and dragged back toward our late prison. Our conductors were evidently in a great hurry. As we passed along we were met by citizens running to and fro, apparently in great terror—women and children uttering shrieks and suddenly disappearing behind walls and battlements. Some fell upon their knees, beating their breasts and praying loudly. Others, clasping their infants, stood shivering and speechless.

"It is just like the way they go in an earthquake," remarked Raoul, "but there is none. What can it be, captain?"

Before I could reply the answer came from another quarter.

Far above an object was hissing and hurtling through the air.

"A shell from ours! Hurrah!" cried Raoul.

I could scarcely refrain from cheering, though we ourselves might be the victims of the missile.

The soldiers who were guarding us had flung themselves down behind walls and pillars, leaving us alone in the open street!

The bomb fell beyond us, and, striking the pavement, burst. The fragments went crashing through the side of an adjoining house; and the wail that came back told how well the iron messengers had done their work. This was the second shell that had been projected from the American mortars. The first had been equally destructive; and hence the extreme terror of both citizen and soldier. Every missile seemed charged with death.

Our guard now returned and dragged us onward, treating us with increased brutality. They were enraged at the exultation visible in our manner; and one, more ferocious than the rest, drove his bayonet into the fleshy part of my comrade's thigh. After several like acts of inhumanity, we were thrown into our prison and locked up as before.

Since our capture we had tasted neither food nor drink, and hunger and thirst added to the misery of our situation.

The insult had maddened Raoul, and the pain of his wound now rendered him furious. He had not hands to touch it or dress it. Frenzied by anger and pain to a strength almost superhuman, he twisted off his iron manacles as if they had been straws. This done, the chain that had bound us together was soon broken, and our ankle "jewelry" followed.

"Let us live our last hours, captain, as we have our lives, free and unfettered!"

I could not help admiring the spirit of my brave comrade.

We placed ourselves close to the door and listened.

We could hear the heavy cannonade all around, and now and then the distant shots from the American batteries. We would wait for the bursting of the bombs, and, as the hoarse thunder of crumbling walls reached our ears, Raoul would spring up, shouting his wild, half-French, half-Indian cries.

A thought occurred to me.

"We have arms, Raoul." I held up the fragments of the heavy chain that had yoked us. "Could you reach the trap on a run, without the danger of mistaking your way?"

Raoul started.

"You are right, captain—I can. It is barely possible they may visit us to-night. If so, any chance for life is better than none at all."

By a tacit understanding, each of us took a fragment of the chain—there were but two—and sat down by the door, to be ready in case our guards should open it. We sat for over an hour, without exchanging a word. We could hear the shells as they burst upon the rooftops, the crashing of torn timbers, and the

rumbling of walls rolling over, struck by the heavy shot. We could hear the shouts of men and the wailing of women, with now and then a shriek louder than all others, as some missile carried death into the terror-struck crowd.

"*Sacre!*" said Raoul; "if they had only allowed us a couple of days, our friends would have opened these doors for us. *Sac-r-re!*"

This last exclamation was uttered in a shriek. Simultaneously a heavy object burst through the roof, tearing the bricks and plaster, and falling with the ring of iron on the floor.

Then followed a deafening crash. The whole earth seemed to shake, and the whizzing of a thousand particles filled the air. A cloud of dust and lime, mixed with the smoke of sulphur, was around us. I gasped for breath, nearly suffocated. I endeavored to cry out, but my voice, husky and coarse, was scarcely audible to myself. I succeeded, at length, in ejaculating:

"Raoul! Raoul!"

I heard the voice of my comrade, seemingly at a great distance. I threw out my arms and groped for him. He was close by me, but like myself, choking for want of air.

"*Sacre!* it was a shell," said he, in a wheezing voice. "Are you hurt, captain?"

"No," I replied; "and you?"

"Sound as a bell—our luck is good—it must have struck every other part of the cell."

"Better it had not missed us," said I, after a pause; "we are only spared for the *garrote*."

"I am not so sure of that, captain," replied my companion, in a manner that seemed to imply he had still hopes of an escape.

"Where that shell came in," he continued, "something else may go out. Let us see—was it the roof?"

"I think so."

We groped our way hand in hand toward the center of the room, looking upward.

"*Peste!*" ejaculated Raoul; "I can't see a foot before me—my eyes are filled—*bah!*"

So were mine. We stood waiting. The dust was gradually settling down; and we could perceive a faint glimmer from above. *There was a large hole through the roof.*

Slowly its outlines became defined, and we could see that it was large enough to pass the body of a man; but it was at least fourteen feet from the floor, and we had not timber enough to make a walking-stick!

"What is to be done? We are not cats, Raoul. We can never reach it!"

My comrade, without making a reply, lifted me up in his arms, telling me to climb. I mounted upon his shoulders, balancing myself like a Bedouin; but with my utmost stretch I could not touch the roof.

"Hold!" cried I, a thought striking me. "Let me down, Raoul. Now, if they will only give us a little time."

"Never fear for them; they've enough to do taking care of their own yellow carcasses."

I had noticed that a beam of the roof formed one side of the break; and I proceeded to twist our hand-cuffs into a clamp, while Raoul peeled off his leather breeches and commenced tearing them into strips. In ten minutes our "tackle" was ready; and, mounting upon my comrade's shoulders, I flung it carefully at the beam. It failed to catch, and I came down to the floor, my balance being lost in the effort. I repeated the attempt. Again it failed, and I staggered down as before.

"*Sacre!*" cried Raoul through his teeth. The iron had struck him on the head.

"Come, we shall try and try—our lives depend upon it."

The third attempt, according to popular superstition, should be successful. It was so with us. The clamp caught, and the string hung dangling downward. Mounting again upon my comrade's shoulders, I grasped the thong high up, to test its hold. It was secure; and, cautioning Raoul to hold fast, lest the hook might be detached by my vibration, I climbed up and seized hold of the beam. By this I was enabled to squeeze myself through the roof.

Once outside, I crawled cautiously along the azotea, which, like all others in Spanish houses, was flat, and bordered by a low parapet of mason-work. I peeped over this parapet, looking down into the street. It was night, and I could see no one below; but up against the sky upon distant battlements I could distinguish armed soldiers, busy around their guns. These blazed forth at intervals, throwing their sulphureous glare over the city.

I returned to assist Raoul: but, impatient of my delay, he had already mounted, and was dragging up the thong after him.

We crawled from roof to roof, looking for a dark spot to descend into the street. None of the houses in the range of our prison were more than one story high; and, after passing several, we let ourselves down into a narrow alley. It was still early, and the people were running to and fro, amidst the frightful scenes of the bombardment. The shrieks of women were in our ears, mingled with the shouts of men, the groans of the wounded, and the fierce yelling of an excited rabble. The constant whizzing of bombs filled the air, and parapets were hurled down. A round shot

struck the cupola of a church as we passed nearly under it, and the ornaments of ages came tumbling down, blocking up the thoroughfare. We clambered over the ruins and went on. There was no need of our crouching into dark shadows. No one thought of observing us now.

"We are near the house—will you still make the attempt to take him along?" inquired Raoul, referring to the boy Narcisso.

"By all means!—show me the place," replied I, half ashamed at having almost forgotten, in the midst of our own perils, the object of our enterprise.

Raoul pointed to a large house with portals, and a great door in the center.

"There, captain—there it is."

"Go under that shadow and wait. I shall be better alone."

This was said in a whisper. My companion did as directed.

I approached the great door, and knocked boldly.

"Quien?" cried the porter within the *saguán*.

"Yo," I responded.

The door was opened slowly, and with caution.

"Is the Senorito Narcisso within?" I inquired.

The man answered in the affirmative.

"Tell him, a friend wishes to speak to him."

After a moment's hesitation the porter dragged himself lazily up the stone steps. In a few seconds the boy—a fine bold looking lad, whom I had seen during our trial—came leaping down. He started on recognizing me.

"Hush!" I whispered, making signs to him to be silent. "Take leave of your friends, and meet me in ten minutes behind the church of La Magdalena."

"Why, senor," inquired the boy without listening, "how have you got out of prison? I have just been to the governor on your behalf, and—"

"No matter how," I replied, interrupting him: "follow my directions—remember your mother and sisters are suffering."

"I shall come," said the boy, resolutely.

"Hasta luego!" (Lose no time then.) *Adios!*"

We parted without another word. I rejoined Raoul, and we walked on toward La Magdalena. We passed through the street where we had been captured on the preceding night, but it was so altered that we should not have known it. Fragments of walls were thrown across the path, and here and there lay masses of bricks and mortar, freshly torn down.

Neither patrol nor sentry thought of troubling us now; and our strange appearance did not strike the attention of the passengers.

We reached the church, and Raoul descended, leaving me to wait for the boy. The latter was true to his word, and his slight figure soon appeared, rounding the corner. Without losing a moment we all three entered the subterranean passage; but the tide was still high, and we had to wait for the ebb. This came at length, and clambering over the rocks, we entered the surf and waded as before. After an hour's toil we reached Punta Hornos; and a little beyond this point I was enabled to hail one of our own pickets, and to pass the lines in safety.

At ten o'clock I was in my own tent—just twenty-four hours from the time I had left it; and, with the exception of Clayley, not one of my brother officers knew anything of our adventure.

Clayley and I agreed to "mount" a party the next night, and carry the boy to his friends. This we accordingly did, stealing out of camp after tattoo. It would be impossible to describe the rejoicing of our new acquaintances—the gratitude lavishly expressed—the smiles of love that thanked us.

We should have repeated our visits almost nightly; but from that time the guerrilleros swarmed in the back country, and small parties of our men, straggling from camp, were cut off daily. It was necessary, therefore, for my friend and myself to chafe under a prudent impatience, and wait for the fall of Vera Cruz.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

THE "City of the true Cross" fell upon the 29th of March, 1847, and the American flag waved over the castle of San Juan de Ulloa. The enemy's troops marched out upon parole, most of them taking their way to their distant homes upon the table-lands of the Andes.

The American garrison entered the town; but the body of our army encamped upon the green plains to the south.

Here we remained for several days, awaiting the order to march into the interior.

A report had reached us that the Mexican forces, under the celebrated Santa Anna, were concentrating at Puente Nacional; but shortly after, it was ascertained that the enemy would make his next stand in the pass of the Cerro Gordo, about half-way between Vera Cruz and the mountains.

After the surrender of the city we were relieved from severe duty; and Clayley and I,

taking advantage of this, resolved upon paying another stolen visit to our friends.

Several parties of light horse had been sent out to scour the country, and it had been reported that the principal guerrilla of the enemy had gone further up toward the Puente Nacional. We did not, therefore, anticipate any danger from that source.

We started after nightfall, taking with us three of our best men—Lincoln, Chane and Raoul. The boy Jack was also of the party. We were mounted on such horses as could be had. The major had kept his word with me, and I bestrode the black—a splendid thoroughbred Arab.

It was clear moonlight, and as we rode along we could not help noticing many changes. War had left its black mark upon the objects around. The ranchos by the road were tenantless—many of them wrecked—not a few of them entirely gone; where they had stood, a ray of black ashes marking the outline of their slight walls. Some were represented by a heap of half-burned rubbish, still smoking and smoldering.

We were within less than a league of Don Cosme's rancho, and still the evidence of ruin and plunder continued; the evidence, too, of a retaliatory vengeance; for, on entering a glade, the mutilated body of a soldier lay across the path. He was upon his back, with open eyes glaring upon the moon. His tongue and heart were cut out, and his left arm had been struck off at the elbow joint. Not ten steps beyond this we passed another one, similarly disfigured. We were now on the neutral ground.

We entered an opening. Raoul, who was then riding in the advance, suddenly checked his horse, waving on us to halt. We did so.

"What is it, Raoul?" I asked, in a whisper.

"Something entered the thicket, captain."

"At what point?"

"There, to the left," and the Frenchman pointed in this direction. I did not see it well; it might have been a stray animal.

"I see'd it, cap'n," said Lincoln, closing up; "it wur a mustang."

"Mounted, think you?"

"I ain't confident; I only see'd its hips. We were a-gwine too fast to get a good sight on the critter, but it wur a mustang. I see'd that clear as daylight."

I sat for a moment, hesitating.

"I kin tell yer whether it wur mounted, cap'n," continued the hunter, "if yer'll let me slide down and take a squint at the critter's tracks."

"It is out of our way. Perhaps you had better," I added, after a little reflection.

"Raoul, you and Chane dismount and go with the sergeant. Hold their horses, Jack."

"If yer'll not object, cap'n," said Lincoln, addressing me in a whisper, "I'd rayther go 'thout kump'ny. Thar ain't two men I'd like, in a tight fix, better'n Rowl and Chane; but I hev done a smart chance o' trackin' in my time, an' I allers gets along better when I'm by myself."

"Very well, sergeant; as you wish it, go alone—we shall wait for you."

The hunter dismounted, and, having carefully examined his rifle, strode off in a direction nearly opposite to that where the object had been seen. I was about to call after him, impatient to continue our journey; but, reflecting a moment, I concluded it was better to leave him to his "instincts." In five minutes he had disappeared, having entered the chaparral.

We sat in our saddles for half-an-hour—not without feelings of impatience. I was beginning to fear that some accident had happened to our comrade, when we heard the faint crack of a rifle, but in a direction nearly opposite to that which Lincoln had taken.

"It's the sergeant's rifle, captain," said Chane.

"Forward!" I shouted; and we dashed into the thicket, in the direction whence the report came. We had ridden about a hundred yards through the chaparral when we met Lincoln coming up, with his rifle shouldered.

"Well?" I asked.

"Twur mounted, cap'n—'tain't now."

"What do you mean, sergeant?"

"That the mustang hed a yeller-belly on his back, and that he hain't got ne'er a one now, as I knows on. He got clear away from me—that is, the mustang. The yeller-belly didn't."

"What! you haven't—?"

"But I hev, captain. I had good soun' reason."

"What reason?" I demanded.

"In the first place, the feller wur a gurillye; and in the next, he wur an outpost picket."

"How know you this?"

"Wal, cap'n, I struck his trail on the edge of the thicket. I knowed he hedn't kum fur, as I looked out for sign whar we crossed the creek bottom, an' see'd none. I tuk the back track, an' soon come up with his dam under a big buttonwood. He had been thar some time, for the ground wur stamped like a bullock-pen."

"Well?" said I, impatient to hear the result.

"I follered him up till I see'd him leanin' for'ard on his horse, clost to the track we oughter take. From this I suspicioned him; but gettin' a leetle clost, I see'd his gun and

fixin's strapped to the saddle. So I tuk a sight, and whumeled him. The darned mustang got away with his traps. This hyur's the only thing worth takin' from his carcage; it w'u'dn't do much harm to a grizzly b'ar."

"Good Heaven!" I exclaimed, grasping the glittering object which the hunter held toward me; "what have you done?"

It was a silver-handled stiletto. I recognized the weapon. I had given it to the boy Narcisso.

"No harm, I reckon, cap'n?"

"The man—the Mexican? How did he look?—what like?" I demanded, anxiously.

"Like?" repeated the hunter. "Why, cap'n, I 'ud call him as ugly a skunk as yer kin skeer up anywhar—'ceptin' it mout be among the Digger Injuns; but yer kin see for y'urself—he's clost by."

I leaped from my horse, and followed Lincoln through the bushes. Twenty paces brought us to the object of our search, upon the border of a small glade. The body lay upon its back, where it had been flung by the rearing mustang. The moon was shining full upon the face. I stooped down to examine it. A single glance was sufficient. I had never seen the features before. They were coarse and swart, and the long black locks were matted and woolly. He was a zambo, and, from the half-military equipments that clung around his body, I saw that he had been a guerrillero. Lincoln was right.

"Wal, cap'n," said he, after I had concluded my examination of the corpse, "ain't he a picter?"

"You think he was waiting for us?"

"For us, or some other game—that's sartin."

"There's a road branches off here to Medellin," said Raoul, coming up.

"It could not have been for us—they had no knowledge of our intention to come out."

"Possibly enough, captain," remarked Clayley, in a whisper to me. "That villain would naturally expect us to return here. He will have learned all that has passed: Narcisso's escape—our visits. You know he would watch night and day to trap either of us."

"Oh, Heavens!" I exclaimed, as the memory of this man came over me; "why did I not bring more men? Clayley, we must go on now. Slowly, Raoul—slowly, and with caution—do you hear?"

The Frenchman struck into the path that led to the rancho, and rode silently forward. We followed in single file, Lincoln keeping a lookout some paces in the rear.

CHAPTER XXX.

CAPTURED BY GUERRILLEROS.

WE emerged from the forest and entered the fields. All silent. No sign or sound of a suspicion. The house still standing and safe.

"The guerrillero must have been waiting for some one whom he expected by the Medellin road. Ride on, Raoul."

"Captain," said the man, in a whisper, and halting at the end of the guardaraya.

"Well?"

"Some one passed out at the other end."

"Some of the domestics, no doubt. You may ride on, and—never mind; I will take the advance myself."

I brushed past and kept up the guardaraya. In a few minutes we had reached the lower end of the pond, where we halted. Here we dismounted; and, leaving the men, Clayley and I stole cautiously forward. We could see no one, though everything about the house looked as usual.

"Are they abed, think you?" asked Clayley.

"No, it is too early; perhaps below, at supper."

"Heaven send! we shall be most happy to join them. I am as hungry as a wolf."

We approached the house. Still all silent.

"Where are the dogs?"

We entered.

"Strange! no one stirring. Hal! the furniture gone!"

We passed into the porch in the rear, and approached the stairway.

"Let us go below. Can you see any light?"

I stooped and looked down. I could neither hear nor see any signs of life. I turned, and was gazing up at my friend in wonderment, when my eye was attracted by a strange movement upon the low branches of the olive trees. The next moment a dozen forms dropped to the ground, and, before we could draw sword or pistol, myself and comrade were bound hand and foot, and flung upon our backs.

At the same instant we heard a scuffle down by the pond. Two or three shots were fired, and a few minutes after a crowd of men came up, bringing with them Chane, Lincoln and Raoul as prisoners.

We were all dragged out into the open ground in front of the rancho, where our horses were also brought and picketed.

Here we lay upon our backs, a dozen guerrilleros remaining to guard us. The others went back among the olives, where we could hear them laughing, talking and yelling. We could see nothing of their movements, as we were tightly bound, and as helpless as if under the influence of nightmare.

As we lay, Lincoln was a little in front of me. I could perceive that they had doubly bound him, in consequence of the fierce resistance he had made. He had killed one of the guerrilleros. He was banded and strapped all over, like a mummy, and he lay gnashing his teeth and foaming with fury. Raoul and the Irishman appeared to take things more easily, or, rather, more recklessly.

"I wonder if they are going to hang us to-night or keep us till morning? What do you think, Chane?" asked the Frenchman, laughing as he spoke.

"Be the crass! they'll lose no time, ye may depend on that same. There's not an ounce of tinder mercy in their black hearts; ye may swear till that, from the way this eel-skin cuts."

"I wonder, Murt," said Raoul, speaking from sheer recklessness, "if Saint Patrick couldn't help us a bit. You have him round your neck, haven't you?"

"Be the powers, Row! though ye be only jokin', I've a good mind to thry his holiness upon him. I've got both him and the Mother under me jacket, av I could only rache him."

"Good!" cried the other. "Do."

"It's aisy for ye to say 'Do,' when I can't budge as much as my little finger."

"Never mind. I'll arrange that," answered Raoul. "Holla, señor!" shouted he to one of the guerrilleros.

"Quien?" (who?) said the man, approaching.

"Usted su mismo" (yourself), replied Raoul.

"Que cosa?" (What is it?)

"This gentleman," said Raoul—still speaking in Spanish, and nodding toward Chane—"has a pocketful of money."

A hint upon that head was sufficient; and the guerrilleros, who, strangely enough, seemed to have overlooked this part of their duty, immediately commenced rifling our pockets, ripping them open with their long knives. They were not a great deal richer for their pains, our joint purses yielding about twenty dollars. Upon Chane there was no money found; and the man whom Raoul had deceived repaid the latter by a curse and a couple of kicks.

The saint, however, turned up, attached to the Irishman's neck by a leathern string; and along with him a small crucifix, and a pewter image of the Virgin Mary.

This appeared to please the guerrilleros; and one of them, bending over the Irishman, slackened his fastenings a little—still, however, leaving him bound.

"Thank yer honner," said Chane; "that's dacent of ye. That's what Misther O'Connell w'd call *amaylioration*. I'm a hape aysier now."

"Mucho bueno," said the man, nodding and laughing.

"Och, be me sowl, yes!—mucho bueno. But I'd have no objecshun if yer honner w'd make it *mucho bettero*. Couldn't ye just take a little turn aff me wrist here?—it cuts like a rayzyer."

I could not restrain myself from laughing, in which Clayley and Raoul joined me; and we formed a chorus that seemed to astonish our captors. Lincoln alone preserved his sullenness. He had not spoken a word.

Little Jack had been placed upon the ground near the hunter. He was but loosely tied, our captors not thinking it worth while to trouble themselves about so diminutive a subject. I had noticed him wriggling about, and using all his Indian craft to undo his fastenings; but he appeared not to have succeeded, as he now lay perfectly still again.

While the guerrilleros were occupied with Chane and his saints, I observed the boy roll himself over and over, until he lay close up against the hunter. One of the guerrilleros, noticing this, picked Jack up by the waistbelt, and, holding him at arm's length, shouted out:

"Mira, camarados! *que briboncito!*" (Look, comrades! what a little rascal!)

Amid the laughing of the guerrilleros, Jack was swung out, and fell into a bed of shrubs and flowers, where we saw no more of him. As he was bound, we concluded that he could not help himself, and was lying where he had been thrown.

My attention was called away from this incident by an exclamation from Chane.

"Och! blood, turf, and murder! If there isn't that Frinch scoundrel Dubrosc!"

I looked up. The man was standing over us.

"Ah, Monsieur le Capitaine!" cried he, in a sneering voice, "*comment vous portez-vous?* You came up dove-hunting—eh? The birds, you see, are not in the cot."

Had there been only a thread around my body, I could not have moved at that moment. I felt cold and rigid as marble. A thousand agonizing thoughts crowded upon me at once—my doubts, my fears on her account, drowning all ideas of personal danger. I could have died at that moment, and without a groan, to have insured her safety.

There was something so fiendish, so utterly hellish, in the character of this man—a polished brutality, too—that caused me to fear the worst.

"Oa, Heaven!" I muttered, "in the power of such a man!"

"Ho!" cried Dubrosc, advancing a pace or

two, and seizing my horse by the bridle, "a splendid mount! An Arab, as I live! Look here, Yanez!" he continued, addressing a guerrillero who accompanied him: "I claim this, if you have no objection."

"Take him," said the other, who was evidently the leader of the party.

"Thank you. And you, Monsieur le Capitaine," he added ironically, turning to me; "thank you for this handsome present. He will just replace my brave mustang, for whose loss I expect I am indebted to you, you great brute!—*sacre!*"

The last words were addressed to Lincoln; and, as though maddened by the memory of La Virgen, he approached the latter, and kicked him fiercely in the side.

The wanton foot had scarcely touched his ribs, when the hunter sprang up as if by galvanic action, the thongs flying from his body in fifty spiral fragments. With a bound he leaped to his rifle; and, clutching it—he knew it was empty—struck the astonished Frenchman a blow upon the head. The latter fell heavily to the earth. In an instant a dozen knives and swords were aimed at the hunter's throat. Sweeping his rifle around him, he cleared an opening, and, dashing past his foes with a wild yell, bounded off through the shrubbery. The guerrilleros followed, screaming with rage; and we could hear an occasional shot, as they continued the pursuit into the distant woods. Dubrosc was carried back into the rancho, apparently lifeless.

We were still wondering how our comrade had untied himself, when one of the guerrilleros, lifting a piece of the thong, exclaimed:

"The little rascal has cut it!" and the man darted into the shrubbery, in search of little Jack. It was with us a moment of fearful suspense. We expected to see poor Jack sacrificed instantly. We watched the man with intense emotion, as he ran to and fro.

At length he threw up his arms with a gesture of surprise, calling out at the same time:

"By all the saints! he's gone!"

"Hurrah!" cried Chane; "holies—such a gossoon as that boy!"

Several of the guerrilleros dived into the thicket; but their search was in vain.

We were now separated, so that we could no longer converse, and were more strictly watched, two sentries standing over each of us. We spent about an hour in this way. Straggling parties at intervals came back from the pursuit; and we could gather, from what we overheard, that neither Lincoln nor Jack had yet been retaken.

We could hear talking in the rear of the rancho, and we felt that our fate was determined upon. It was plain Dubrosc was not in command of the party. Had he been so, we should never have been carried beyond the olive grove. It appeared we were to be hung elsewhere.

At length a movement was visible that betokened departure. Our horses were taken away, and saddled mules were led out in front of the rancho. Upon these we were set and strapped tightly to the saddles. A serape was passed over each of us and we were blinded by tapojos. A bugle then sounded the "forward." We could hear a confusion of noises, the prancing of many hoofs, and the next moment we felt ourselves moving along at a hurried pace through the woods.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A BLIND RIDE.

WE rode all night. The mule-blinds, although preventing us from seeing a single object, proved to be an advantage. They saved our eyes and faces from the thorny claws of the acacia and mezquite. Without hands to fend them off, these would have torn us badly, as we could feel them, from time to time, penetrating even the hard leather of the tapojos. Our thongs chafed us, and we suffered great pain from the monotonous motion. Our road lay through thick woods. This we could perceive from the constant rustle of the leaves and the crackling of branches, as the cavalcade passed on.

Toward morning our route led over hills, steep and difficult, we could tell from the attitudes of our animals. We had passed the level plains and were entering among the "foothills" of the Mexican mountains. There was no passing or repassing of one another. From this I concluded that we were journeying along a narrow road, and in single file.

Raoul was directly in front of me, and we could converse at times.

"Where do you think they are taking us, Raoul," I inquired, speaking in French.

"To Cenobio's hacienda. I hope so, at least."

"Why do you hope so?"

"Because we shall stand some chance for our lives. Cenobio is a noble fellow."

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, captain; I have helped him a little in the contraband trade."

"A smuggler, is he?"

"Why, in this country, it is hardly fair to call it by so harsh a name, as the government

itself dips out of the same dish. Smuggling here, as in most other countries, should be looked upon rather as the offspring of necessity and maladministration than as vice in itself. Cenobio is a *contrabandista*, and upon a large scale."

"And you are a political philosopher, Raoul?"

"Bah! captain, it would be bad if I could not defend my own calling," replied my comrade, with a laugh.

"You think, then, that we are in the hands of Cenobio's men?"

"I am sure of it, captain. *Sacre!* had it been Jarauta's band, we should have been in heaven—that is, our souls—and our bodies would now be embellishing some of the trees upon Don Cosme's plantation. Heaven protect us from Jarauta! The robber-priest gives but short shrift to any of his enemies; but if he could lay his hands on your humble servant, you would see hanging done in double-quick time."

"Why think you we are with Cenobio's guerrilla?"

"I know Yanez, whom we saw at the rancho. He is one of Cenobio's officers, and the leader of this party, which is only a detachment. I am rather surprised that he has brought us away, considering that Dubrosc is with him; there must be some influence in our favor which I cannot understand."

I was struck by the remark, and began to reflect upon it in silence. The voice of the Frenchman again fell upon my ear.

"I cannot be mistaken. No—this hill—it runs down to the San Juan river."

Again, after a short interval, as we felt ourselves fording a stream, Raoul said:

"Yes, the San Juan—I know the stony bottom—just the depth, too, at this season."

Our mules plunged through the swift current, flinging the spray over our heads. We could feel the water up to the saddle-flaps, cold as ice, and yet we were journeying in the hot tropic. But we were fording a stream fed by the snows of Orizava.

"Now I am certain of the road," continued Raoul, after we had crossed. "I know this bank well. The mule slides. Look out, captain!"

"For what?" I asked, with some anxiety.

The Frenchman laughed as he replied:

"I believe I am taking leave of my senses. I called to you to look out, as if you had the power to help yourself in case the accident should occur."

"What accident?" I inquired, with a nervous sense of some impending danger.

"Falling over; we are on a precipice that is reckoned dangerous on account of the clay; if your mule should stumble here, the first thing you would strike would be the branches of some trees five hundred feet below, or thereabout."

"Good Heaven!" I ejaculated; "is it so?"

"Never fear, captain; there is not much danger. These mules appear to be sure-footed; and certainly," he added, with a laugh, "their loads are well packed and tied."

I was in no condition just then to relish a joke, and my companion's humor was completely thrown away upon me. The thought of my mule missing his foot and tumbling over a precipice, while I was stuck to him like a centaur, was anything else than pleasant. I had heard of such accidents, and the knowledge did not make the reflection any easier. I could not help muttering to myself—

"Why, in the name of mischief, did the fellow tell me this till we had passed it?"

I crouched closer to the saddle, allowing my limbs to follow every motion of the animal, lest some counteracting shock might disturb our joint equilibrium. I could hear the torrent, as it roared and hissed far below, appearing directly under us; and the "sough" grew fainter and fainter as we ascended.

On we went, climbing up—up—up; our strong mules straining against the precipitous path. It was daybreak. There was a faint glimmer of light under our tapojos. At length we could perceive a brighter beam. We felt a sudden glow of heat over our bodies; the air seemed lighter; our mules walked on a horizontal path. We were on the ridge, and warmed by the beams of the rising sun.

"Thank Heaven we have passed it!"

I could not help feeling thus; and yet perhaps we were riding to an ignominious death!

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DRINK A LA CHEVAL.

THE guerrilleros now halted and dismounted. We were left in our saddles. Our mules were picketed upon long lazoes, and commenced browsing. They carried us under the thorny branches of the wild locust. The maguery, with its bill-shaped claws, had torn our uniform overalls to shreds. Our limbs were lacerated, and the cactus had lodged its poisoned prickles in our knees. But these were nothing to the pain of being compelled to keep our saddles, or rather saddle-trees—for we were upon the naked wood. Our hips ached intensely, and our limbs smarted under the chafing thong.

There was a crackling of fires around us.

Our captors were cooking their breakfasts, and chatting gayly over their chocolate. Neither

food nor drink was offered to us, although we were both thirsty and hungry. We were kept in this place for about an hour.

"They have joined another party here," said Raoul, "with pack-mules."

"How know you?" I inquired.

"I can tell by the shouts of the arrieros. Listen!—they are making ready to start."

There was a mingling of voices—exclamations addressed to their animals by the arrieros.

A bugle at length sounded, and we felt ourselves again moving onward.

Our road appeared to run along the naked ridge. There were no trees, and the heat became intense.

We began to suffer from thirst, and Raoul asked one of the guerrilleros for water.

"Carajo!" answered the man; "it's no use; you'll be choked by-and-by with something else than thirst."

The brutal jest called forth a peal of laughter from his comrades.

About noon we commenced descending a long hill. I could hear the sound of water ahead.

"Where are we, Raoul?" I inquired, faintly.

"Going down to a stream—a branch of the Antigua."

"We are coming to another precipice?" I asked, with some uneasiness, as the roar of the torrent began to be heard more under our feet, and I snuffed the cold air rising from below.

"There is one, captain. There is a good road, though, and well paved."

"Paved! Why, the country around is wild, is it not?"

"True; but the road was paved by the priests."

"By the priests!" I exclaimed, with some astonishment.

"Yes, captain; there's a convent in the valley, near the crossing; that is, there was one. It is now a ruin."

We crept slowly down, our mules at times seeming to walk on their heads. The hissing of the torrent gradually grew louder, until our ears were filled with its hoarse rushing.

I heard Raoul below me shouting some words in a warning voice, when suddenly he seemed borne away, as if he had been tumbled over the precipice.

I expected to feel myself next moment launched after him into empty space, when my mule, uttering a loud whinny, sprang forward and downward.

Down—down! the next leap into eternity! No—she keeps her feet! She gallops along a level path! I am safe!

I was swung about until the thongs seemed to cut through my limbs; and with a heavy plunge I felt myself carried thigh-deep into water.

Here the animal suddenly halted.

As soon as I could gain breath I shouted at the top of my voice for the Frenchman.

"Here, captain!" he answered, close by my side; but, as I fancied, with a strange, gurgling voice.

"Are you hurt, Raoul?" I inquired.

"Hurt? No, captain."

"What was it, then?"

"Oh! I wished to warn you, but I was too late. I might have known that they would stampede, as the poor brutes have been no better treated than ourselves. Hear how they draw it up!"

"Good God! I am choking!" I exclaimed, listening to the water as it filtered through the teeth of my mule.

"Do as I do, captain," said Raoul, speaking as if from the bottom of a well.

"How?" I asked.

"Bend down, and let the water run into your mouth."

This accounted for Raoul's voice sounding so strangely.

"They may not give us a drop," continued he.

"It is our only chance."

"I have not even that," I replied, after having vainly endeavored to reach the surface with my face.

"Why?" asked my comrade.

"I cannot reach it."

"How deep are you?"

"To the saddle-flaps."

"Ride this way, captain. It's deeper here."

"How can I? My mule is her own master, as far as I am concerned."

"Parbleu!" said the Frenchman. "I did not think of that."

But, whether to oblige me, or moved by a desire to cool her flanks, the animal plunged forward into a deeper part of the stream.

After straining myself to the utmost I was enabled to "duck" my head. In this painful position I contrived to get a couple of swallows; but I should think I took in quite as much at my nose and ears.

Clayley and Chane followed our example, the Irishman swearing loudly that it was a "burnin'" shame to make a decent Christy in drink like a horse in winkers."

Our guards now commenced driving our mules out of the water. As we were climbing the bank, some one touched me lightly upon the arm; and at the same instant a voice whispered in my ear: "Courage, captain!"

I started—it was the voice of a female. I was about to reply, when a soft, small hand was

thrust under the tapajo, and pushed something between my lips. The hand was immediately withdrawn, and I heard the voice urging a horse onward.

I pressed the paper against the tapajo, covering it with my lips, so as to conceal it in case the blind should be removed.

"Halted again?"

"It is the ruin, captain—the old convent of Santa Bernardina."

"But why do they halt here?"

"Likely to noon and breakfast—that on the ridge was only their *desayuna*. The Mexicans of the "tierra caliente" never travel during mid-day. They will doubtless rest here until the cool of the evening."

"I trust they will extend the same favor to us," said Clayley: "God knows we stand in need of rest. I'd give them three months' pay for an hour upon the tread-mill, only to stretch my limbs."

"They will take us down, I think—not on our account, but to ease the mules. Poor brutes! they are no parties to this transaction."

Raoul's conjecture proved correct. We were taken out of our saddles, and, being carefully bound as before, we were hauled into a damp room, and flung down upon the floor. Our captors went out. A heavy door closed after them, and we could hear the regular footfall of a sentry on the stone pavement without. For the first time since our capture we were left alone. This my comrades tested by rolling themselves all over the floor of our prison to see if any one was present with us. It was but a scant addition to our liberty; but we could converse freely, and that was something.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN ODD WAY OF OPENING A LETTER.

"HAS any of you heard of Dubroc on the route?" I inquired of my comrades.

No: nothing had been heard of him since the escape of Lincoln.

"Faix, captain," said the Irishman, "it's meself that thinks Mister Dubroc won't trouble any of us any more. It was a purty lick that same, ayquil to ould Donnybrook itself."

"It is not easy to kill a man with a single blow of a clubbed rifle," observed Clayley, "unless, indeed, the lock may have struck into his skull. But we are still living, and I think that is some evidence that the deserter is dead. By the way, how has the fellow obtained such influence as he appeared to have among them, and so soon, too?"

"I think, lieutenant," replied Raoul, "Monsieur Dubroc has been here before."

"Ha! say you so?" I inquired, with a feeling of anxiety.

"I remember, captain, some story current at Vera Cruz, about a Creole having married or run away with a girl of good family there. I am almost certain Dubroc was the name; but it was before my time, and I am unacquainted with the circumstances. I remember, however, that the fellow was a gambler, or something of the sort; and the occurrence made much noise in the country."

I listened with a sickening anxiety to every word of these details. There was a painful correspondence between them and what I already knew. The thought that this monster could be in any way connected with her was a disagreeable one. I questioned Raoul no further. Even could he have detailed every circumstance, I should have dreaded the relation.

Our conversation was interrupted by the creaking of a rusty hinge. The door opened and several men entered. Our blinds were taken off, and, oh! how pleasant to look upon the light! The door had been closed again, and there was only one small grating, yet the slender beam through this was like the bright noon-day sun. Two of the men carried earthen platters filled with frijoles, a single tortilla in each platter. They were placed near our heads, one for each of us.

"It's blissid kind of yez, gentlemen," said Chane; "but how are we goin' to ate it, if ye please?"

"The plague!" exclaimed Clayley; "do they expect us to lick this up without either hands, spoons or knives?"

"Won't you allow us the use of our fingers?" asked Raoul, speaking to one of the guerrilleros.

"No," replied the man, gruffly.

"How do you expect us to eat, then?"

"With your mouths, as brutes should. What else?"

"Thank you, sir; you are very polite."

"If you don't choose that, you can leave it alone," added the Mexican, going out with his companions and closing the door behind them.

Now was my time to read the note. I rolled myself under the grating, and, after several efforts, succeeded in gaining my feet. The window, which was not much larger than a pigeon-hole, widened inward like an embrasure of a gun-battery. The lower slab was just the light of my chin; and upon this, after a good deal of dodging and lip jugglery, I succeeded in spreading out the paper to its full extent.

"What on earth are you at, captain?" in-

quired Clayley, who had watched my maneuvers with some astonishment.

Raoul and the Irishman stopped their plate-licking and looked up.

"Hush! go on with your dinners—not a word!" I read as follows:

"To-night your cords shall be cut, and you must escape as you best can after-ward. Do not take the road back, as you will be certain to be pursued in that direction; moreover, you run the risk of meeting other parties of the guerrilla. Make for the National Road at San Juan or Manga de Clavo. Your posts are already advanced beyond these points. The Frenchman can easily guide you. Courage, captain! Adieu!"

"P.S.—They waited for you. I had sent one to warn you; but he has either proved traitor or missed the road. Adieu! adieu!"

"Good heavens!" I involuntarily exclaimed, "the man that Lincoln—"

I caught the paper into my lips again, and chewed it into a pulp, to avoid the danger of its falling into the hands of the guerrilla.

I remained turning over its contents in my mind. I was struck with the masterly style—the worldly cunning exhibited by the writer. There was something almost *unfeminine* about it. I could not help being surprised that one so young, and hitherto so secluded from the world, should possess such a knowledge of men and things. I was already aware of the presence of a powerful intellect, but one, as I thought, altogether unacquainted with practical life and action. Then there was the peculiarity of her situation. Is she a prisoner like myself? or is she disguised, and periling her life to save mine? or can she be—Patience! To-night may unravel the mystery.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE COBRA-DI-CAPELLO.

UP to this moment my attention had been engrossed with the contents of the note, and I had no thought of looking outward. I raised myself on tiptoe, stretching my neck as far as I could into the embrasure.

A golden sunlight was pouring down upon broad green leaves, where the palms grew wildly. Red vines hung in festoons, like curtains of scarlet satin. There were bands of purple and violet—the maroon-colored morus, and the snowy flowers of the magnolia—a glittering opal. Orange-trees, with white, wax-like flowers, were bending under their golden globes. The broad plumes of the corozo palm curved gracefully over, their points trailing downward, and without motion.

A clump of these grew near, their naked stems laced by a parasite of the liana species, which rose from the earth and, traversing diagonally, was lost in the feathery frondage above. These formed a canopy, underneath which, from tree to tree, three hammocks were extended. One was empty; the other two were occupied. The elliptical outlines, traceable through the gauzy network of Indian grass, proved that the occupants were females.

Their faces were turned from me. They lay motionless; they were asleep.

As I stood gazing upon this picture, the occupant of the nearest hammock awoke, and turning, with a low murmur upon her lips, again fell asleep. Her face was now toward me. My heart leaped, and my whole frame quivered with emotion. I recognized the features of Guadalupe Rosales.

My heart was full of mixed emotions—surprise, pleasure, love, pain. Yes, pain; for she could thus sleep—sleep sweetly, tranquilly—while I, within a few paces of her couch, was bound and brutally treated!

"Yes, she can sleep!" I muttered to myself, as my chagrin predominated in the tumult of emotions. "Ha! Heavens!"

My attention was attracted from the sleeper to a fearful object. I had noticed a spiral-like appearance upon the liana. It had caught my eye once or twice while looking at the sleeper; but I had not dwelt upon it, taking it for one vine twined around another—a peculiarity often met with in the forests of Mexico.

A bright sparkle now attracted my eye; and, on looking at the object attentively, I discovered, to my horror, that the spiral protuberance upon the vine was nothing else than the folds of a snake! Squeezing himself silently down the parasite—for he had come from above—the reptile slowly uncoiled two or three of the lowermost rings and stretched his glistening neck horizontally over the hammock. Now, for the first time, I perceived the horned protuberance on his head, and recognized the dreaded reptile—the *macaurel* (the cobra of America).

In this position he remained for some moments, perfectly motionless, his neck proudly curved like that of a swan, while his head was not twelve inches from the face of the sleeper. I fancied that I could see the soft down upon her lip playing under his breath!

"Oh, Heaven!" I gasped out, in the intensity of my fears; "is this the fiend himself? She moves!—now he will strike! Not yet—she is still again. Now—now!—mercy! she trembles!—the hammock shakes—she is quivering under the fasci— Ha!"

A shot rung from the walls; the snake sud-

denly jerked back his head—his rings flew out, and he fell to the earth, writhing as if in pain.

The girls started with a scream, and sprung simultaneously from their hammocks.

Grasping each other by the hand, with terrified looks, they rushed from the spot and disappeared.

Several men ran up, ending the snake with their sabers. One of them stooped, and, examining the carcass of the dead reptile, exclaimed:

"Carai! There is a hole in his head—he has been shot!"

A moment after, half a dozen of the guerrilleros burst open the door and rushed in, crying out as they entered:

"Quien tira?" (Who fired?)

"What do you mean?" angrily asked Raoul, who had been in ill-humor ever since the guerrillero had refused him a draught of water.

"I ask you who fired the shot?" repeated the man.

"Fired the shot!" echoed Raoul, knowing nothing of what had occurred outside. "We look like firing a shot, don't we? If I possessed that power, my gay friend, the first use I should make of it would be to send a bullet through that clumsy skull of yours."

"Santissima!" ejaculated the Mexican, with a look of astonishment. "It could not be these—they are all tied!"

And the Mexicans passed out again, leaving us to our reflections.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE HEAD-QUARTERS OF THE GUERRILLA.

MINE were anything but agreeable. I was pained and puzzled. I was pained to think that she—dearer to me than life—was thus exposed to the dangers that surrounded us. It was her sister that had occupied the other hammock.

"Are they alone? Are they prisoners in the hands of these half-robbers? May not their hospitality to us have brought them under prescription? And are they not being carried—father, mother, and all—before some tribunal? Or, are they traveling for protection with this band—protection against the less scrupulous robbers that infest the country?"

It was not uncommon upon the Rio Grande, when rich families journeyed from point to point, to pay for an escort of this sort. This may elucidate—

"But I tell yez I did hear a crack; and, be me sowl! it was the sargint's rifle, or I've lost me sines intirely."

"What is it?" I asked, attracted to the conversation of my comrades.

"Chane says he heard a shot, and thinks it was Lincoln's," answered Clayley.

"His gun has a queer sound, captain," said the Irishman, appealing to me. "It's diffrint intirely from a Mexican piece, and not like our own nayther. It's a way he has in loadin' it."

"Well—what of that?"

"Why, Raowl says one of them axed him who fired. Now, I heerd a shot, for my ear was close till the door here. It was beyant like; but I c'd swear upon the blissed crass it was ayther the sargint's rifle or another as like it as two pays."

"It is very strange!" I muttered, half in soliloquy, for the same thought had occurred to myself.

"I saw the boy, captain," said Raoul—"I saw him crossing when they opened the door."

"The boy!—what boy?" I asked.

"The same we brought out of the town."

"Ha! Narcisso!—you saw him?"

"Yes; and, if I'm not mistaken, the white mule that the old gentleman rode to camp. I think that the family is with the guerrilla, and that accounts for our still being alive."

A new light flashed upon me. In the incidents of the last twenty hours I had never once thought of Narcisso. Now all was clear—clear as daylight. The zambo whom Lincoln had killed—poor victim!—was our friend, sent to warn us of danger; the dagger, Narcisso's—a token for us to trust him. The soft voice—the small hand thrust under the tapajo—yes, all were Narcisso's!

A web of mystery was torn to shreds in a single moment. The truth did not yield gratification. No—but the contrary. I was chagrined at the indifference exhibited in another quarter.

"She must know that I am here, since her brother is master of the fact—here, bleeding and bound. Yet, where is her sympathy? She sleeps! She journeys within a few paces of me, where I am tied painfully; yet not a word of consolation. No! She is riding upon her soft cushion, or carried upon a *litera*, escorted, perhaps, by this accomplished villain, who plays the gallant cavalier upon my own barb! They converse together, perhaps of the poor captives in their train, and with jest and ridicule—he at least; and she can hear it, and then fling herself into her soft hammock and sleep—sleep sweetly—calmly!"

These bitter reflections were interrupted. The door creaked once more upon its hinges. Half-a-dozen of our captors entered. Our blinds were put on, and we were carried out and mounted as before.

In a few minutes a bugle rung out, and the route was resumed.

We were carried up the stream bottom—a kind of glen, or *canada*. We could feel by the cool shade and the echoes that we were traveling under heavy timber. The torrent roared in our ears, and the sound was not unpleasant. Twice or thrice we forded the stream, and sometimes left it, returning after having traveled a mile or so. This was to avoid the canyons, where there is no path by the water. We then ascended a long hill, and after reaching its summit commenced going downward.

"I know this road well," said Raoul. "We are going down to the hacienda of Cenobio."

"Pardieu!" he continued. "I ought to know this hill."

"For what reason?"

"First, captain, because I have carried many a *bullo* of cochineal and many a bale of smuggled tobacco over it; ay, and upon nights when my eyes were of as little service to me as they are at present."

My ear at this moment caught the sound of dogs barking hoarsely below. Horses of the cavalcade commenced neighing, answered by others from the adjacent fields, who recognized their old companions.

"It must be near night," I remarked to Raoul.

"I think about sunset, captain," rejoined he. "It feels about that time."

I could not help smiling. There was something ludicrous in my comrade's remark about "feeling" the sunset.

The barking of the dogs now ceased, and we could hear voices ahead welcoming the guerrilleros.

The hoofs of our mules struck upon a hard pavement, and the sounds echoed as if under an arched way.

Our animals were presently halted, and we were unpacked and flung rudely down upon rough stones, like so many bundles of merchandise.

We lay for some minutes listening to the strange voices around. The neighing of horses, the barking and growling of dogs, the lowing of cattle, the shouts of the arrieros unpacking their mules, the clanking of sabers along the stone pavement, the tinkling of spurs, the laughter of men, and the voices of women—all were in our ears at once.

Two men approached us, conversing.

"They are of the party that escaped us at La Virgen. Two of them are officers."

"Chingaro! I got this at La Virgen, and a full half-mile off. 'Twas some black jugglery in their bullets. I hope the *patrone* will hang the Yankee savages."

"Quien saber?" (who knows?) replied the first speaker.

"By the Virgin! Jose, I've half a mind to slip off and join the Padre."

"Jarauta?"

"Yes; he's by the Bridge, with a brave set of Jarochos—some of our old comrades upon the Rio Grande among them. They are living at free quarters along the road, and having gay times of it, I hear. If Jarauta had taken these Yankees yesterday, the zopilote would have made his dinner upon them to-day."

"That's true," rejoined the other; "but come, let us unblind the devils and give them their beans. It may be the last they'll ever eat."

With this consoling remark, Jose commenced unbuckling our tapajos, and we once more looked upon the light. The brilliance at first dazzled us painfully, and it was some minutes before we could look steadily at the objects around us.

We had been thrown upon the pavement in the corner of the *patio*—a large court, surrounded by massive walls and flat-roofed houses.

Near the center of the patio was a large fountain, boiling up into a reservoir of hewn mason-work; and around this fountain were clumps of orange-trees, their leaves in some places dropping down into the water. Various arms hung or leaned against the walls—guns, pistols, and sabers—and two small pieces of cannon, with their caissons and carriages, stood in a prominent position. In these we recognized our old acquaintances of La Virgen.

A long trough stretched across the patio, and out of this a double row of mules and Mustangs were greedily eating maize.

The guerrilleros were seated or standing in groups around the fires, broiling jerked beef upon the points of their sabers. Women in rebozos and colored skirts walked to and fro among the men.

The women carried jars filled with water. They knelt before smooth stones, and kneaded tortillas. They stirred chile and chocolate in earthen ollas. They cooked frijoles in flat pans; and amidst all these occupations, they joked and laughed and chatted with the men.

Packages of what appeared to be merchandise lay in one corner of the court. Around this were groups of arrieros, in their red leathern garments, securing their charge for the night, and laying out their *alparejas* in long rows by the wall.

Over the opposite roofs—for our position was elevated—we could see the bright fields and

forest, and far beyond, the Cofre de Perote and the undulating outlines of the Andes. Above all the white-roled peak of Orizava rose up against the heavens like a pyramid of spotless snow.

The sun had gone down behind the mountains, but his rays still rested upon Orizava, bathing its cone with a yellow light, like a mantle of burnished gold. Clouds of red, and white, and purple, hung like a glory upon his track, and, descending, rested upon the lower summits of the Cordillera. The peak of the "Burning Star" alone appeared above the clouds, towering in sublime and solitary grandeur.

There was a picturesque loveliness about the scene—an idea of sublimity—that caused me for the moment to forget where I was, or that I was a captive. My dream was dispelled by the harsh voice of Jose who at that moment came up with a couple of peons, carrying a large earthen dish that contained our supper.

This consisted of black beans with half-a-dozen tortillas; but as we were half-famished, we did not offer any criticism on the quality of the viands. The dish was placed in our midst, and our arms were untied for the first time since our capture. There were neither knives, forks, nor spoons; but Raoul showed us the Mexican fashion of "eating our spoons," and twisting up the tortillas, we scooped and swallowed "right ahead."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHANE'S COURTSHIP.

THE dish was emptied, as Clayley observed, in a "squirrel's jump."

"Be my sowl! it ates purty well, black as it is," said Chane, looking ruefully into the empty vessel. "It's got a worse complaint than color. C'u'dn't yez fetch us a thrifle more of it, my darlint boy?" he added, squinting up at Jose.

"No *entiende*," said the Mexican, shaking his head.

"No in tin days!" cried Chane, mistaking the "no *entiende*" for a phrase of broken English, to which, indeed, its pronunciation somewhat assimilates it. "Och! git out wid you! Bad luck to yer pitcher! In tin days it's Murtagh Chane that'll ayther be takin' his tay in purgatory, or 'atin' bether than black banes in some other part of the world."

"No *entiende*," repeated the Mexican, as before.

"Tin days, indade! Sure we'd be did wid hunger in half that time. We want the banes now."

"No *entiende*, *senor*," again replied the man.

"Go to owld Nick!" cried Chane, whose patience was now exhausted.

"Que quiere?" asked the Mexican, speaking to Raoul, who was by this time convulsed with laughter.

"Phwhat's that he sez, Raowl?" inquired Chane, sharply.

"He says he don't understand you."

"Thin spake to him yerself, Raowl. Till him we want more banes, and a few more ov thim pancakes, if he plazes."

Raoul translated the Irishman's request.

"No *hay*," answered the Mexican, shaking his forefinger in front of his nose.

"No I—is that phwhat ye say, my darlint! Well, iv yez won't go yerself, sind somebody else; it's all the same thing, so yez bring us the ateables."

"No *entiende*," said the man, with the same shake of the head.

"Oh! there ag'in with your tin days—but it's no use; yez understand me well enough, but yez don't want to bring the banes."

"He tells you there is no more," said Raoul.

"Oh! the desavin' Judas! and five hundred ov thim grazers 'atin' over beyant there. No more banes! oh, the lie!"

"Frijoles—no *hay*," said the Mexican, guessing at the purport of Chane's remarks.

"Fray holeys!" repeated Chane, imitating the Mexican's pronunciation of the word "frijoles." "Och! git out wid your fray holeys! There isn't the size of a flay of holiness about the place. Git out!"

Raoul, and indeed all of us except the Irishman himself, were bursting with laughter.

"I'm chokin'" said the latter, after a pause; "ask him for wather, Raoul—sure he can't deny that, with that purty little sthrame boilin' up undher our noses, as clear as the potteen of Ennishowen." Raoul asked for water, which we all needed. Our throats were as dry as charcoal. The Mexican made a sign to one of the women, who shortly came up with an earthen jar filled with water.

"Give it first to the captain, misthress," said Chane, pointing to me; "sarve all ayqually, but respict rank."

The woman understood the sign, and handed me the jar. I drank copiously, passing it to my comrades, Clayley and Raoul. Chane at length took the jar; but instead of drinking immediately, as might have been expected, he set it between his knees and looked quizzically up at the woman.

"I say, my little darlint," said he winking, and touching her lightly under the ribs with his outstretched palm, "my little *moochacha*—that's what they call thim—isn't it, Raoul?"

"Muchacha! oh, yes."

"Well thin, my purty little moochacha, c'u'dn't yez—ye know what I mane. C'u'dn't yez—? Och! ye know well enough—only a little—jist a mouthful to take the cowl'd taste aff the wather."

"No entiende," said the woman, smiling good-naturedly at Chane's comical gestures.

"Och, the plaguel there's that tin days ag'in. Talk to her, Raowl. Tell her what I mane."

Raoul translated his comrade's wishes.

"Tell her, Raowl, I've got no money, because I have been robbed, de ye see; but I'll give her ayther of these saints for the smallest thrifle of agwardent," and he pulled the images out of his jacket as he spoke.

The woman, seeing these, bent forward with an exclamation; and, recognizing the crucifix, with the images of the saint and Virgin, dropped upon her knees and kissed them devoutly, uttering some words in a language half Spanish, half Aztec.

Rising up, she looked kindly at Chane, exclaiming, "*Bueno Catolico!*" She then tossed the rebozo over her left shoulder, and hurried off across the yard.

"De yez think, Raowl, she's gone after the licker?"

"I am sure of it," answered the Frenchman.

In a few minutes the woman returned, and, drawing a small flask out of the folds of her rebozo, handed it to Chane.

The Irishman commenced undoing the string that carried his "relics."

"Which ov them de yez want, misthress?—the saint, or the Howly Mother, or both?—it's all the same to Murtagh."

The woman, observing what he was after, rushed forward, and, placing her hands upon his, said in a kind tone:—

"No, *senor*. *Su proteccion necesita V.*"

"Phwbat diz she say, Raowl?"

"She says keep them; you will need their protection yourself."

"Och, be me sowl! she's not far astray there. I need it bad enough now, an' a hape ov good they're likely to do me. They've hung there for tin years—both of them; and this nate little flask's the first raal binifit I iver resaved from ayther of them. Thry it, capt'in. It'll do yez good."

I took the bottle and drank. It was the *chingarito*—a bad species of *aguardiente* from the wild aloe—and hot as fire. A mouthful sufficed. I handed the flask to Clayley, who drank more freely. Raoul followed suit, and the bottle came back to the Irishman.

"Your hilt, darlint!" said he, nodding to the Mexican woman. "May yez live till I wish ye dead!"

"The woman smiled, and repeated, "*No entiende.*"

"Och! nivir mind the tin days—we won't quarrel about that. Ye're a swate crayteur," continued he, winking at the woman; "but sure yer petticoats is mighty short, an' yez want a pair of stockin's bad, too; but nivir mind—yez stand well upon them illegant ankles—'dade ye do; and yez have a purty little futt into the bargain."

"*Que dice?*" (what does he say?) asked the Mexican, speaking to Raoul.

"He is complimenting you on the smallness of your feet," answered the Frenchman.

The woman was evidently pleased, and commenced cramping up what was in fact a very small foot into its faded satin slipper.

"Tell me, my dear," continued Chane, "are yez married?"

"*Que dice?*" again asked the woman.

"He wants to know if you are married."

She smiled, waving her forefinger in front of her nose.

Raoul informed the Irishman that this was a negative answer to his question.

"By my sowl, thin," said Chane, "I w'u'dn't mind marryin' ye meself, an' joinin' the thrife—that is, if they'll let me off from the hangin'. Tell her that, Raowl."

As desired, Raoul explained his comrade's last speech, at which the woman laughed, but said nothing.

"Silence gives consent. But tell her, Raowl, that I won't buy a pigin a poke; they must first let me off from the hangin', do ye hear?—tell her that."

"*El senor esta muy alegre*" (the gentleman is very merry), said the woman; and, picking up her jar with a smile, she left us.

"I say, Raowl, does she consent?"

"She hasn't made up her mind yet."

"By the holy vismunt! thin it's all up wid Murt! The saints v'on't save him. Take another dhrap, Raowl!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DANCE OF THE TAGAROTA.

NIGHT fell, and the blazing fagots threw their glare over the patio, striking upon objects picturesque at all times, but doubly so under the red light of the pine fires. The grouping of guerrilleros—their broad, heavy hats, many of them plumed—their long black hair and pointed beards—their dark, flashing eyes—their teeth, fierce and white—the half-savage expression of their features—their costumes, high-colored and

wild-like—all combined in impressing us with strange feelings.

The mules, the mustangs, the dogs, the peons, the slippered wenches, with their coarse trailing tresses, the low roofs, the iron-barred windows, the orange-trees by the fountain, the palms hanging over the wall, the glistening cocuyos, were all strange sights to us.

By a blazing pile, close to where we sat, a party of guerrilleros, with their women, were dancing the *tagarota*, a species of fandango.

Two men, seated upon raw-hide stools, strummed away upon a pair of bandolons, while a third pinched and pulled at the strings of an old guitar—all three aiding the music with their shrill, disagreeable voices.

During the dance every species of deformity was imitated and caricatured, for this is the *tagarota*. It was a series of grotesque and repulsive pictures.

I was sick of the scene, and watched it no longer. My eyes turned to the portale, and I looked anxiously through the half-drawn curtains.

"It is strange I have seen nothing of them! Could they have turned off on some other route? No; they must be here. Narcisso's promise for to-night! He at least is here. And she? Perhaps occupied within—gay, happy, indifferent—oh!"

The pain shot afresh through my heart.

Suddenly the curtain was drawn aside, and a brilliant picture appeared within—brilliant, but to me like the glimpse which some condemned spirit might catch over the walls of Paradise. Officers in bright uniforms, and among these I recognized the elegant person of Dubrosc. Ladies in rich dresses, and among these—her sister, too, was there, and the Dona Joaquina, and half a dozen other ladies, rustling in silks and blazing with jewels.

Several of the gentlemen—young officers of the band—wore the picturesque costume of the guerrilleros.

They were forming for the dance.

"Look, captain!" cried Clayley; "Don Cosme and his people, by the living earthquake!"

"Hush! do not touch me—do not speak to me!"

I felt as though my heart would stop respiration. It rose in my bosom, and seemed to hang for minutes without beating. My throat felt dry and husky, and a cold perspiration broke out upon my skin.

He approaches her—he asks her to dapce—she consents! No; she refuses. Brave girl! She has strayed away from the dancers, and looks over the balustrade. She is sad. Was it a sigh that caused her bosom to rise? Ha! he comes again. She is smiling! he touches her hand!

"Fiend! false woman!" I shouted at the top of my voice as I sprang up, impelled by passion. I attempted to rush toward them. My feet were bound, and I fell heavily upon my face!

The guards seized me, tying my hands. My comrades, too, were rebound. We were dragged over the stones into a small room in one corner of the patio.

The door was bolted and locked, and we were left alone.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A KISS IN THE DARK.

I BEGAN to look around our prison, and see what chances it offered for escape.

After several painful efforts I raised myself upon my feet, propping my body against the side of the prison. There was an aperture—a window about as large as a loophole for musketry. I spun myself along the wall until I stood directly under it. It was just the height of my chin. Cautioning my companions to silence, I placed my ear to the aperture and listened. A low sound came wailing from the fields without. I did not heed this. I knew it was the wolf. It rose again louder than before. A peculiarity in the howl struck me, and I turned, calling to Raoul.

"What is it, captain?" inquired he.

"Do you know if the prairie wolf is found here?"

"I do not know if it be the true prairie wolf, captain. There is one something like the coyote."

I returned to the aperture and listened.

"Again the howl of the prairie wolf—the bark! By heavens! it is Lincoln!"

Now it ceased for several minutes, and then came again, but from another direction.

"What is to be done? If I answer him it will alarm the sentry. I will wait until he comes closer to the wall."

I could tell that he was creeping nearer and nearer.

Finding that he had not been answered, the howling ceased. I stood listening to every sound from without. My comrades, who had now become apprised of Lincoln's proximity, had risen to their feet and were leaning against the walls.

We were about half an hour in this situation, without exchanging a word, when a light tap was heard from without, and a soft voice whispered—

"*Hola, capitan!*"

I placed my ear to the aperture. The whisper was repeated. It was not Lincoln—that was clear.

It must be Narcisso.

"*Quien?*" I asked.

"*Yo, capitan.*"

I recognized the voice that had addressed me in the morning.

It is Narcisso.

"Can you place your hands in the aperture?" said he.

"No; they are tied behind my back."

"Can you bring them opposite, then?"

"No; I am standing on my toes, and my wrists are still far below the sill."

"Are your comrades all similarly bound?"

"All."

"Let one get on each side of you, and raise you up on their shoulders."

Wondering at the astuteness of the young Spaniard, I ordered Chane and Raoul to lift me as he directed.

When my wrists came opposite the window I cautioned them to hold on. Presently a soft hand touched mine, passing all over them. Then I felt the blade of a knife pressed against the thong, and in an instant it leaped from my wrists. I ordered the men to set me down, and I listened as before.

"Here is the knife; you can release your own ankles and those of your comrades. This paper will direct you further. You will find the lamp inside."

A knife, with a folded and strangely shining note, was passed through by the speaker.

"And now, capitan—one favor," continued the voice, in a trembling tone.

"Ask it!—ask it!"

"I would kiss your hand before we part."

"Dear—noble boy!" cried I, thrusting my hand into the aperture.

"Boy! ah, true—you think me a boy. I am no boy, capitan, but a woman—one who loves you with all her blighted, broken heart!"

"Oh, Heavens! it is, then—dearest Guadalupe!"

"Ha! I thought as much: now I will not. But, no—what good would it be to me? No—no—no! I shall keep my word."

This appeared to be uttered in soliloquy, and the tumult of my thoughts prevented me from noticing the strangeness of these expressions. I thought of them afterward.

"Your hand! Your hand!" I ejaculated.

"You would kiss my hand?—do so!" The little hand was thrust through, and I could see it in the dim light, flashing with brilliants. I caught it in mine, covering it with kisses. It seemed to yield to the fervid pressure of my lips.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, in the transport of my feelings, "let us not part—let us fly together! I was wronging you, loveliest, dearest Guadalupe—"

A slight exclamation, as if from some painful emotion, and the hand was plucked away, leaving one of the diamonds in my fingers. The next moment the voice whispered, with a strange sadness of tone, as I thought:

"Adieu, capitan! adieu! *In this world of life we never know who best loves us!*"

I was puzzled—bewildered. I called out, but there was no answer. I listened until the patience of my comrades was well nigh exhausted, but still there was no voice from without; and, with a strange feeling of uneasiness and wonderment, I commenced cutting the thongs from my ankles.

Having set Raoul at liberty, I handed him the knife and proceeded to open the note. Inside I found a cocuyo; and using it as I had been already instructed, I read:

"The walls are adobe. You have a knife. The side with the loophole fronts outward. There is a field of magueys, and beyond this you will find the forest. You may then trust to yourselves. I can help you no further. *Carissimo caballero, adios!*"

I had no time to reflect upon the peculiarities of the note, though the boldness of the style struck me as corresponding with the other. I flung down the firefly, crushing the paper into my bosom; and seizing the knife, was about to attack the adobe wall, when voices reached me from without. I sprang forward and placed my ear to listen. It was an altercation—a woman—a man! "By Heaven! it is Lincoln's voice."

"Yer cussed whelp! ye'd see the cap'n hung, would yer?—a man that's good vally for the full of a pararer of green-gutted greasers; but I ain't a gwine to let you look at his hangin'. If yer don't show me which of these houn pigeon-holes is his'n, an' help me to get him out'n it, I'll skin yer like a mink!"

"I tell you, Mister Lincoln," replied a voice, which I recognized as the one whose owner had just left me. "I have this minute given the captain the means of escape, through that loophole."

"Whar?"

"This one," answered the female voice.

"Wal—that's easy to circumstantiate; kum along hyur! I ain't a-gwine to let yer go till it's all fixed—de ye hear?"

I heard the heavy foot of the hunter as he

approached, and presently his voice calling through the loophole in a guarded whisper:

"Cap'n!"

"Hush, Bob! it's all right," I replied, speaking in a low tone, for the sentries were moving suspiciously around the door.

"Good!" ejaculated he; "yer kin go now," he added to the other, whose attention I endeavored to attract, but dared not call to loud enough, lest the guards should hear me. "Dash my buttons! I don't want yer to go—yer a good 'un arter all—why can't yer kum along? The cap'n 'll make it all straight ag'in about the desertion."

"Mr. Lincoln, I cannot go with you; please suffer me to depart."

"Wall yer own likes! but if I kin do yer a good turn, you can depend on Bob Linkin—mind that."

"Thank you! thank you!"

And before I could interfere to prevent it, she was gone. I could hear the voice, sad and sweet in the distance, calling back, "*adios!*"

I had no time for reflection, else the mystery that surrounded me would have occupied my thoughts for hours. It was time to act. Again I heard Lincoln's voice at the loophole.

"What is it?" I inquired.

"How are yer ter get out, cap'n?"

"We are cutting a hole through the wall."

"If yer can give me the spot, I'll meet yer half-ways."

I measured the distance from the loophole, and handed the string to Lincoln. We heard no more from the hunter until the moonlight glanced through the wall upon the blade of his knife. Then he uttered a short ejaculation, such as may be heard from the "mountain men" at peculiar crises; and after that we could hear him exclaiming:

"Look out, Row! Hang it, man, ye're a-cuttin' my claws!"

In a few minutes the hole was large enough to pass our bodies; and one by one we crawled out, and were once more at liberty.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MARIA DE MERCED.

THERE was a deep ditch under the wall, filled with cactus plants and dry grass. We lay in the bottom of this for some minutes, panting with fatigue. Our limbs were stiff and swollen, and we could hardly stand upright. A little delay then was necessary, to bring back the blood and determine our future course.

"We had best ter keep the gully," whispered Lincoln. "I kum across the fields myself, but that 'ar kiver's thin, and they may sight us."

"The best route is the ditch," assented Raoul; "there are some windows, but they are high, and we can crawl under them."

"Forward, then!" I whispered to Raoul.

We crept down the ditch on all-fours, passing several windows that were dark and shut. We reached one, the last in the row, where the light streamed through. Notwithstanding our perilous situation, I resolved to look in. There was an impulse upon me which I could not resist. I was yearning for some clew to the mystery that hung around me.

The window was high up, but it was grated with heavy bars; and, grasping two of these, I swung myself to its level. Meanwhile my comrades had crept into the magueys to wait for me.

I raised my head cautiously and looked in. It was a room somewhat elegantly furnished, but my eye did not dwell long on that. A man sitting by the table engrossed my attention. This man was Dubosc. The light was full upon his face, and I gazed upon its hated lines until I felt my frame trembling with passion.

As I gazed at Dubosc, the door of the apartment opened, and a young man entered. He was strangely attired, in a costume half-military, half-ranchero. There was a fineness, a silky richness, about the dress and manner of this youth, that struck me. His features were dark and beautiful.

After looking at him for a moment I began to fancy I had seen the features before. It was not Narcisso; him I should have known, and yet there was a resemblance. Yes—he even resembled *her*! I started as this thought crossed me. I strained my eyes; the resemblance grew stronger.

Oh, heaven! could it be?—dressed thus? No, no! those eyes—ha! I remember! The boy at the rendezvous—on board the transport—the island—the picture! It is *she*—the cousin—*Maria de Merced*!

These recollections came with the suddenness of a single thought, and passed as quickly. Later memories crowded upon me. The adventure of the morning—the strange words uttered at the window of my prison—the small hand! This, then, was the author of our deliverance.

A hundred mysteries were explained in a single moment.

"Guadalupe knows nothing of my presence, then. *She is innocent.*"

This thought alone restored me to happiness. A thousand others rushed through my brain in quick succession—some pleasant, others painful.

But there was no time to be lost. My com-

rades were already chafing at my delay; and, joining them, we crept through the magueys, parting the broad, stiff leaves with our fingers. We were soon upon the edge of the chaparral wood. Another bound, and we were in the woods.

CHAPTER XL.

THE PURSUIT.

For a time there was a strange irresolution in my flight. The idea of leaving Guadalupe in such company—that after all they might be prisoners, or, even if not, the thought that they were in the power of Dubosc to any extent—was enough to render me wretched and irresolute. But what could we do? Five men, almost unarmed?

"It would be madness to remain—madness and death. The woman—she possesses some mysterious power over this brute, her paramour; she will guard them."

This thought decided me, and I yielded myself freely to flight. We had but little fear of being caught again. We had too much confidence, particularly Lincoln and myself, in our forest-craft. Raoul knew all the country, the thickets and the passes. We stopped a moment to deliberate on the track we should take. A bugle rung out behind us, and the next instant the report of a cannon thundered in a thousand echoes along the glen.

"It is from the hacienda," said Raoul; "they have missed us already."

"Is that 'sign,' Row?" asked Lincoln.

"It is," replied the other; "it's to warn their scouts. They're all over these hills. We must look sharp."

"I don't like this hyur timber; it's too scant. C'u'dn't yer put us in the crick bottom, Row?"

"There's a heavy chaparral," said the Frenchman, musing; "it's ten miles off. If we could reach that, we're safe—a wolf can hardly crawl through it. We must make it before day."

"Lead on then, Row!"

We stole along with cautious steps. The rustling of a leaf or the cracking of a dead stick might betray us; for we could hear signals upon all sides, and our pursuers passing us in small parties, within ear-shot.

We bore to the right, in order to reach the creek bottom of which Lincoln had spoken. We soon came into this, and followed the stream down, but not on the bank. Lincoln would not hear of our taking the bank path, arguing that our pursuers would be "sartin ter foller the cl'ar trail."

The hunter was right, for shortly after a party came down the stream. We could hear the clinking of their accouterments, and even the conversation of some of the men, as follows:

"But, in the first place, how did they get loose within? and who cut the wall from the outside, unless some one helped them? *Carajo!* it's not possible."

"That's true, Jose," said another voice. "Some one must, and I believe it was that giant that got away from us at the rancho. The shot that killed the snake came from the chaparral, and yet we searched and found nobody. Mark my words, it was he; and I believe he has hung upon our track all the way."

"*Vaya*!" exclaimed another; "I shouldn't much like to be under the range of his rifle; they say he can kill a mile off, and hit wherever he pleases. He shot the snake right through the eyes."

"By the Virgin!" said one of the guerrilleros, laughing, "he must have been a snake of good taste, to be caught toying around that dainty daughter of the old Spaniard! It reminds me of what the Book tells about mother Eva and the old serpent. Now, if the Yankee's bullet—"

We could hear no more, as the voices died away in the distance and under the sound of the water.

"Ay," muttered Lincoln, finishing the sentence; "if the Yankee's bullet hadn't been needed for the varmint, some o' yer w'u'dn't 'a' been waggin' yer clappers as ye air."

"It was you, then?" I asked, turning to the hunter.

"Twur, cap'n; but for the cussed catawampus, I 'ud 'a' g'in Mister Dubosc his ticket. I hed almost sighted him when I see'd the flash o' the thing's eye, an' I knowed it wur a-gwine to strike the gal."

"And Jack?" I inquired, now for the first time thinking of the boy.

"I guess he's safe enuf, cap'n. I sent the little feller back with the word ter the kurnel."

"Ha! then we may expect them from camp?"

"No doubt on it, cap'n; but yer see, if they kum, they may not be able to foller us beyond the rancho. So it'll be best for us not to depend on them, but ter take Row's track."

"You are right. Lead on, Raoul!"

After a painful journey we reached the thicket of which Raoul had spoken; and dragging ourselves into it, we came to a small opening, covered with long dry grass. Upon this luxurious couch we resolved to make a bivouac. We were all worn down by the fatigues of the day and night preceding, and, throwing ourselves upon the grass, in a few minutes were asleep.

CHAPTER XLI.

A NEW AND TERRIBLE ENEMY.

It was daylight when I awoke—broad daylight. My companions, all but Clayley, were already astir, and had kindled a fire with a species of wood known to Raoul, that produced hardly any smoke. They were preparing breakfast. On a limb close by hung the hideous, human-like carcass of an iguana, still writhing. Raoul was whetting a knife to skin it, while Lincoln was at some distance, carefully reloading his rifle. The Irishman lay upon the grass, peeling bananas and roasting them over the fire.

The iguana was soon skinned and broiled, and we all of us commenced eating with good appetites.

"Be Saint Pathrick!" said Chane, "this bates frog-'atin' all hollow. It's little meself dhramed, on the Owld Sod, hearin' of thim niggers in furin parts, that I'd be turning kanny-lawl meself some day!"

"Don't you like it, Murtagh?" asked Raoul, jocosely.

"Och! indade, yes; it's better than an empty brid-basket; but if yez could only taste a small thrife ov a Wicklow ham this mornin', an' a smilin' pratie, instid of this brown soap, y'z—"

"Hisht!" said Lincoln, starting suddenly, and holding the bite half way to his mouth.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I'll tell yer in a minit, cap'n."

The hunter waved his hand to enjoin silence, and, striding to the edge of the glade, fell flat to the ground. We knew he was listening, and waited for the result. We had not long to wait, for he had scarce brought his ear in contact with the earth when he sprung suddenly up again, exclaiming:

"*Houn's trailin' us, by the Eternal!*"

It was seldom that Lincoln uttered an oath, and when he did there was something awful in his manner. He wore a despairing look, too, unusual to the bold character of his features. This, with the appalling statement, acted on us like a galvanic shock; and by one impulse we leaped from the fire, and threw ourselves flat upon the grass.

Not a word was spoken as we strained our ears to listen.

At first we could distinguish a low moaning sound, like the hum of a wild bee; it seemed to come out of the earth. After a little it grew louder and sharper; then it ended in a yelp and ceased altogether. After a short interval it began afresh, this time still clearer; then came the yelp, loud, sharp, and vengeful. There was no mistaking that sound. *It was the bark of the Spanish bloodhound.*

We sprung up simultaneously, looking around for weapons, and then staring at each other with an expression of despair.

The rifle and two case-knives were all the weapons we had.

"What's to be done?" cried one, and all eyes were turned upon Lincoln.

The hunter stood motionless, clutching his rifle and looking to the ground.

"How fur's the crik, Row?" he asked after a pause.

"Not two hundred yards: this way it lies."

"I kin see no other chance, cap'n, than ter take the water; we may bamfozzle the houn's a bit, if thar's good wadin'."

"Nor I." I had thought of the same plan.

"If we hed bed bowies, we mouter fit the dogs whar we air, but yer see we hain't; an' I kin tell by thar growl ther ain't less nor a dozen on 'em."

"It's no use to remain here; lead us to the creek, Raoul;" and, following the Frenchman, we dashed recklessly through the thicket.

On reaching the stream we plunged in. It was one of those mountain torrents common in Mexico—spots of still water alternating with cascades, that dash and foam over shapeless masses of amygdaloidal basalt. We waded through the first pool, and then, clambering among the rocks, entered a second. This was a good stretch, a hundred yards or more of still, crystal water, in which we were waist-deep.

We took the bank at the lower, and on the same side, and striking back into the timber, kept on parallel to the course of the stream. We did not go far away from the water, lest we might be pushed again to repeat the *ruse*.

All this time the yelping of the bloodhounds had been ringing in our ears. Suddenly it ceased.

"They have reached the water," said Clayley.

"No," rejoined Lincoln, stopping a moment to listen; "they're chawin' the bones of the varmint."

"There again!" cried one, as their deep voices rung down the glen in the chorus of the whole pack. The next minute the dogs were mute a second time, speaking at intervals in a fierce growl, that told us they were at fault.

Beyond an occasional bark, we heard nothing of the bloodhounds until we had gained at least two miles down the stream. We began to think we had baffled them in earnest, when Lincoln, who had kept in the rear, was seen to throw himself flat upon the grass. We all stopped, looking at him with breathless anxiety. It was

but a minute. Rising up with a reckless air, he struck his rifle fiercely upon the ground, exclaiming:

"Hades swamp them houn's! they're arter us ag'in!"

By one impulse we all rushed back to the creek, and scrambling over the rocks, plunged into the water and commenced wading down.

A sudden exclamation burst from Raoul in the advance. We soon learnt the cause, and to our dismay. We had struck the water at a point where the stream canyoned.

On each side rose a frowning precipice, straight as a wall. Between these the black torrent rushed through a channel only a few feet in width, so swiftly that, had we attempted to descend by swimming, we should have been dashed to death against the rocks below.

To reach the stream further down it would be necessary to make a circuit of miles, and the hounds would be on our heels before we could gain three hundred yards.

We looked at each other and at Lincoln, all panting and pale.

"Stumped at last!" cried the hunter, gritting his teeth with fury.

"No!" I shouted, a thought at that moment flashing upon me. "Follow me, comrades! We'll fight the bloodhounds upon the cliff."

I pointed upward. A yell from Lincoln announced his approval.

"Hooray!" he cried, leaping on the bank; "that idee's jest like yer, Cap. Hooray! Now, boys, for the bluff!"

Next moment we were straining up the gorge that led to the precipice, and the next, we had reached the highest point, where the cliff by a bold projection butted over the stream. There was a level platform covered with tufted grass, and upon this we took our stand.

CHAPTER XLII.

A BATTLE WITH BLOODHOUNDS.

We stood for some moments gathering breath and nerving ourselves for the desperate struggle. I could not help looking over the precipice. It was a fearful sight. Below, in a vertical line two hundred feet down, the stream rushing through the canyon broke upon a bed of sharp, jagged rocks, and then glided on in seething, snow-white foam. There was no object between the eye and the water; no jutting ledge, not even a tree, to break the fall—nothing but the spiky boulders below and the foaming torrent that washed them.

It was some minutes before our unnatural enemies made their appearance, but every howl sounded nearer and nearer. Our trail was warm, and we knew they were scenting it on a run. At length the bushes crackled, and we could see their white breasts gleaming through the leaves. A few more springs, and the foremost bloodhound bounded out upon the bank, and, throwing up his broad jaws, uttered a hideous "growl."

He was at fault where we had entered the water. His comrades now dashed out of the thicket, and, joining in the chorus of disappointment, scattered among the stones.

An old dog, scarred and cunning, kept along the bank until he had reached the top of the canyon. This was where we had made our crossing. Here the hound entered the channel, and, springing from rock to rock, reached the point where we had dragged ourselves out of the water. A short yelp announced to his comrades that he had lifted the scent, and they all threw up their noses and came galloping down.

There was a swift current between two large boulders of basalt. We had leaped this. The old dog reached it, and stood straining upon the spring, when Lincoln fired, and the hound, with a short "wough," dropped in upon his head and was carried off like a flash.

"Counts one less to pitch over," said the hunter, hastily reloading his rifle.

Without appearing to notice the strange conduct of their leader, the others crossed in a string, and, striking the warm trail, came yelling up the pass. It was a grassy slope, such as is often seen between two tables of a cliff; and as the dogs strained upward, we could see their white fangs, and the red blood that had baited them clotted along their jaws. Another crack from Lincoln's rifle, and the foremost hound tumbled back down the gorge.

"Two rubbed out!" cried the hunter, and at the same moment I saw him fling his rifle to the ground.

The hounds kept the trail no longer. Their quarry was before them; their howling ended, and they sprung upon us with the silence of the assassin. The next moment we were mingled together, dogs and men, in the fearful struggle of life and death!

I know not how long this strange encounter lasted. I felt myself grappling with the tawny monsters, and hurling them over the cliff. Now they sprung at my throat and I threw out my arms, thrusting them fearlessly between the shining rows of teeth. Then I was free again, and seizing a leg, or a tail, or the loose flaps of the neck, I dragged a savage brute toward the brink, and, summoning all my strength, dashed him against its brow, and saw him tumble howling over.

Once I lost my balance, and nearly staggered

over the precipice; and at length, panting, bleeding and exhausted, I fell to the earth. I could struggle no longer.

I looked around for my comrades. Clayley and Raoul had sunk upon the grass, and lay torn and bleeding. Lincoln and Chane, holding a hound between them, were balancing him over the bluff.

"Now, Murter," cried the hunter, "gi'n him a good heist, and see if we kin pitch him cl'ar on t'other side; hee-woop!—hoo!"

And with this ejaculation the kicking animal was launched into the air. I could not resist looking after. The yellow body bounded from the face of the opposite cliff, and fell with a heavy plash upon the water below.

He was the last of the pack!

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN INDIAN RUSE.

A wild shout now drew our attention, and, looking up the creek, we saw our pursuers just debouching from the woods. They were all mounted, and, pressing their mustangs down to the bank, where they halted with a strange cry.

"What is it, Raoul? Can you tell the meaning of that cry?"

"They are disappointed, captain. They must dismount, and foot it like ourselves; there is no crossing for horses."

"Good. Oh! if we had but a rifle each! This pass—" I looked down the gorge. We could have defended it against the whole party, but we were unarmed.

The guerrilleros now dismounted, tying their horses to the trees and preparing to cross over. One, who seemed to be their leader, judging from his brilliant dress and plumes, had already advanced into the stream, and stood upon a projecting rock with his sword drawn. He was not more than three hundred yards from the position we occupied on the bluff.

"Do you think you can reach him?" I said to Lincoln, who had reloaded his rifle and stood eyeing the Mexican, apparently calculating the distance.

"I'm 'feerd, cap'n, he's too fur. I'd giv a half-year's sodger-pay for a crack out o' the major's Dutch gun. We can lose nothin' in tryin'. Murter, will yer stan' afore me? Thar ain't no kiver, un' the feller's watchin'. He'll dodge like a duck, if he sees me takin' sight on 'im."

Chane threw his large body in front, and Lincoln, cautiously slipping his rifle over his comrade's shoulder, sighted the Mexican.

The latter had noticed the maneuver; and perceiving the danger he had thrust himself into, was about turning to leap down from the rock, when the rifle cracked—his plumed hat flew off, and throwing out his arms, he fell with a dead plunge upon the water! The next moment his body was sucked into the current, and followed by his hat and plumes, was borne down the canyon with the velocity of lightning.

Several of his comrades uttered a cry of terror; and those who had followed him out into the open channel ran back toward the bank and screened themselves behind the rocks. A voice, louder than the rest, was heard exclaiming:

"*Carajo! guardaos!—esta el rifle del diablo!*" (Look out! it is the devil's rifle.)

It was doubtless the comrade of Jose, who had been in the skirmish of La Virgen, and had felt the bullet of the *zundnadel*.

The guerrilleros, awed by the death of their leader—for it was Yanez who had fallen—crouched behind the rocks. Even those who had remained with the horses, six hundred yards off, sheltered themselves behind trees and projections of the bank. The party nearest us kept loading and firing their escopettes. Their bullets flattened upon the face of the cliff, or whistled over our heads. Clayley, Chane, Raoul and myself, being unarmed, had thrown ourselves behind the scarp, to avoid catching a stray shot. Not so Lincoln, who stood boldly out on the highest point of the bluff, as if disdaining to dodge their bullets.

I never saw a man so completely soaring above the fear of death. There was a sublimity about him that I remember being struck with at the time; and I remember, too, feeling the inferiority of my own courage. It was a stupendous picture, as he stood like a colossus, clutching his deadly rifle and looking over his long brown beard at the skulking and cowardly foe. He stood without a motion—without even winking—although the leaden hail hurtled past his head and cut the grass at his feet, with that peculiar "zip-zip" so well remembered by the soldier who has passed the ordeal of a battle.

There was something in it awfully grand—awful even to us; no wonder that it awed our enemies.

I was about to call upon Lincoln to fall back and shelter himself, when I saw him throw up his rifle to the level. The next instant he dropped the butt to the ground, with a gesture of disappointment. A moment after, the maneuver was repeated with a similar result, and I could hear the hunter gritting his teeth.

"The cowardly skunks!" muttered he; "they keep a-gwine like a bull's tail in fly-time."

In fact, every time Lincoln brought his piece to a level, the guerrilleros ducked, until not a head could be seen.

"They ain't as good as their own dogs," continued the hunter, turning away from the cliff. "If we hed a lot of loose rocks, cap'n, we mout keep them down thar till doomsday."

A movement was now visible among the guerrilleros. About one-half of the party were seen to mount their horses and gallop off up the creek.

"They're gone round by the ford," said Raoul, "it's not over a mile and a half. They can cross with their horses there, and will be on us in half-an-hour."

What was to be done? There was no timber to hide us now—no chaparral. The country behind the cliff was a sloping table, with here and there a stunted palm-tree, or a bunch of "Spanish bayonet" (*yucca angustifolia*). This would be no shelter, for from the point we occupied, the most elevated on the ridge, we could have descried an object of human size five miles off. At that distance from us the woods began; but could we reach them before our pursuers would overtake us?

Had the guerrilleros all gone off by the ford, we should have returned to the creek bottom; but a party remained below; and we were cut off from our former hiding-place. We must, therefore, strike for the woods.

But it was necessary first to decoy the party below, otherwise they would be after us before the others; and experience had taught us that these Mexicans could run like hares.

This was accomplished by an old Indian trick that both Lincoln and myself had practiced before. It would not have "fooled" a Texan Ranger, but it succeeded handsomely with the guerrilleros.

We first threw ourselves on the ground, in such a position that only our heads could be seen by the enemy, who still kept blazing away from their escopettes. After a short while our faces gradually sunk behind the crest of the ridge, until nothing but our forage-caps appeared above the sward. We lay thus for some moments, showing a face or two at intervals. Our time was precious, and we could not perform the pantomime to perfection; but we were not dealing with Comanches, and for "Don Diego" it was sufficiently artistic.

Presently we slipped our heads, one by one, out of their covers, leaving the five caps upon the grass, inclining to each other in the most natural positions. We then stole back, lizard fashion, and, after sprawling a hundred yards or so, rose to our feet and ran like scared dogs. We could tell that we had duped the party below, and we heard them firing away at our empty caps long after we had left the scene of our late adventure.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A COUP D'ÉCLAIR.

MANY an uneasy look was thrown over our shoulders as we struggled down that slope. Our strength was urged to its utmost; and this was not much, for we had all lost blood in our encounter with the sleuth-hounds, and felt weak and faint.

We were baffled, too, by a storm—a fierce tropical storm. The rain, thick and heavy, plashed in our faces, and made the ground slippery under our feet. The lightning flashed in our eyes, and the electric sulphur shortened our breathing. Still we coughed, and panted, and staggered onward, moved by the knowledge that death was behind us.

I shall never forget that fearful race. I thought it would never end. I can only liken it to one of those dreams in which we are always making endeavors to escape from some horrible monster, and are as often hindered by a strange and mysterious helplessness. I remember it now as then. I have often repeated that flight in my sleep, and always awoke with a feeling of shuddering horror.

We had got within five hundred yards of the timber. Five hundred yards is not much to a fresh runner; but to us, toiling along at a trot that much more resembled a walk, it seemed an infinity. A small prairie, with a stream beyond, separated us from the edge of the woods—a smooth sward without a single tree. We had entered upon it—Raoul, who was light of foot, being in the advance, while Lincoln, from choice, hung in the rear.

An exclamation from the hunter caused us to look back. We were too much fatigued and worn-out to be frightened at the sight. Along the crest of the hill a hundred horsemen were dashing after us in full gallop, and the next moment their vengeful screams were ringing in our ears!

"Now, do yer best, boys!" cried Lincoln, "an' I'll stop the cavortin' of that 'ere foremost feller afore he gits much funner."

We trailed our bodies on, but we could hear the guerrilleros fast closing upon us. The bullets from their escopettes whistled in our ears, and cut the grass around our feet. I saw Raoul, who had reached the timber, turn suddenly round and walk back. He had resolved to share our fate.

"Save yourself, Raoul!" I called, with my

weak voice; but he could not have heard me above the din. I saw him still walking toward us. I heard the screams behind; I heard the shots, and the whizzing of bullets, and the fierce shouts.

I heard the clatter of hoofs, and the rasping of sabers, as they leaped out of their iron sheaths; and among these I heard the crack of Lincoln's rifle, and the wild yell of the hunter. Then a peal of thunder drowned all other sounds. The heavens one moment seemed on fire, then black—black. I felt the stifling smell of sulphur—a hot flash—a quick stroke from some invisible hand, and I sunk senseless to the earth!

Something cool in my throat and over my face brought back the consciousness that I lived. It was water. I opened my eyes, but it was some moments before I could see Raoul was bending over me, and lavng my temples with water from his boot.

I muttered some half-coherent inquiries. "It was a *coup d'clair*, captain," said Raoul. Good heavens! We had been struck by lightning!

Raoul, being in advance, had escaped. The Frenchman soon left me and went to Clayley, who, with Chane and the hunter, lay close by—all three, as I thought, dead. They were pale as corpses, with here and there a spot of purple, or a livid line traced over their skins, while their lips presented the whitish, bloodless hue of death.

"Are they dead?" I asked, feebly. "I think not—we shall see," and the Frenchman poured some water into Clayley's mouth.

The latter sighed heavily, and appeared to revive. Raoul passed on to the hunter, who, as soon as he felt the water, started to his feet, and clutching his comrade fiercely by the throat, exclaimed—

"Yur cussed catamount! yur w'd hang me, w'd yur?" Seeing who it was, he stopped suddenly, and looked round with an air of extreme bewilderment. His eyes now fell upon the rifle; and, all at once seeming to recollect himself, he staggered toward it and picked it up. Then, as if by instinct, he passed his hand into his pouch and coolly commenced loading.

While Raoul was busy with Clayley and the Irishman, I had risen to my feet and looked back over the prairie. The rain was falling in torrents, and the lightning still flashed at intervals. At the distance of fifty paces a black mass was lying upon the ground, motionless—a mass of men and horses, mingled together as they had fallen in their tracks! Here and there a single horse and his rider lay prostrate together. Beyond these, twenty or thirty horsemen were galloping in a circle over the plain, and vainly endeavoring to head their frightened steeds toward the point where we were. These, like Raoul, had escaped the stroke.

"Come!" cried the Frenchman, who had now resuscitated Clayley and Chane; "we have not a moment to lose. The mustangs will get over their fright, and these fellows will be down upon us."

His advice was instantly followed, and before the guerrilleros could manage their scared horses we had entered the thicket, and were crawling along under the wet leaves.

CHAPTER XLV. THE JARACHOS.

We headed toward the National Bridge. Raoul had a friend half-way on the route—an old comrade upon whom he could depend. His rancho was in a secluded spot, near the road that leads to the rinconada of San Martin. We should find refreshment there; and, if not a bed, "at least," said Raoul, "a roof and a petate." We should not be likely to meet any one, as it was ten miles off, and it would be late when we reached it.

It was late, near midnight, when we dropped in upon the contrabandista—for such was the friend of Raoul; but he and his family were still astir, under the light of a very dull wax candle.

Jose Antonio—that was his name—was a little "sprung" at the five bareheaded apparitions that burst so suddenly upon him; but, recognizing Raoul, we were cordially welcomed.

Our host was a spare, bony old fellow, in leathern jacket and calzoneros, with a keen shrewd eye, that took in our situation at a single glance, and saved the Frenchman a great deal of explanation. Notwithstanding the cordiality with which his friend received him, I noticed that Raoul seemed uneasy about something as he glanced around the room; for the rancho, a small cane structure, had only one.

There were two women stirring about—the wife of the contrabandista, and his daughter, a plump, good-looking girl of eighteen or thereabout.

"No han cenado, caballeros?" (you have not supped, gentlemen) inquired, or rather affirmed, Jose Antonio, for our looks had answered the question before it was asked.

"Ni cenado—ni almorzado" (nor dined—nor breakfasted), replied Raoul with a grin.

"Carambo! Rafaela! Jesusita!" shouted

our host, with a sign, such as, among the Mexicans, often conveys a whole chapter of intelligence. The effect was magical. It sent Jesusita (Little Jesus) to her knees before the tortilla-stones; and Rafaela, Jose's wife, seized a string of tassajo, and plunged it into the olla. Then the little palm-leaf fan was handled, and the charcoal blazed and crackled, and the beef boiled, and the black beans simmered, and the chocolate frothed up, and we all felt happy under the prospect of a savory supper.

I had noticed that, notwithstanding all this, Raoul seemed uneasy. In the corner I discovered the cause of his solicitude, in the shape of a small spare man, wearing the shovel-hat and black capote of a priest. I knew that my comrade was not partial to priests, and that he would sooner have trusted Satan himself than one of the tribe; and I attributed his uneasiness to this natural dislike for the clerical fraternity.

"Who is he, Antone?" I heard him whisper to the contrabandista.

"The cure of San Martin," was the reply.

"He is new, then?" said Raoul.

"Hombre de bien" (a good man), answered the Mexican, nodding as he spoke.

Raoul seemed satisfied and remained silent.

I could not help noticing the "*hombre de bien*" myself; and no more could I help fancying, after a short observation, that the rancho was indebted for the honor of his presence more to the black eyes of Jesusita than to any zeal on his part regarding the spiritual welfare of the contrabandista or his family.

There was a villainous expression upon his lip as he watched the girl moving over the floor; and once or twice I caught him scowling upon Chane, who, in his usual Irish way, was "blarneying" with Jesusita, and helping her to fan the charcoal.

"Where's the padre?" whispered Raoul to our host.

"He was in the rinconada this morning."

"In the rinconada!" exclaimed the Frenchman, starting.

"They're gone down to the Bridge. The band has had a fandango with your people, and lost some men. They say they have killed a good many stragglers along the road."

"So he was in the rinconada, you say? and this morning, too?" inquired Raoul, in a half soliloquy, and without heeding the last remarks of the contrabandista.

"We've got to look sharp, then," he added, after a pause.

"There's no danger," replied the other, "if you keep from the road. Your people have already reached El Plan, and are preparing to attack the Pass of the Cerro. *El Cojo*, they say, has twenty thousand men to defend it."

During this dialogue, which was carried on in whispers, I had noticed the little padre shifting about uneasily on his seat. At its conclusion he rose up, and, bidding our host "*buenas noches*," was about to withdraw, when Lincoln, who had been quietly eying him for some time, with that sharp, searching look peculiar to men of his kidney, jumped up, and, placing himself before the door, exclaimed in a drawling, emphatic tone:

"No, yer don't!"

"Que cosa?" (what's the matter?) asked the padre, indignantly.

"Kay or no kay—cosser or no cosser—yer don't go out o' hyur afore we do. Rowl, ax y'ur friend for a piece o' twine, will yer?"

The padre appealed to our host, and he in turn appealed to Raoul. The Mexican was in a dilemma. He dared not offend the cure, and on the other hand he did not wish to dictate to his old comrade Raoul. Moreover, the fierce hunter, who stood like a huge giant in the door, had a voice in the matter; and therefore Jose Antonio had three minds to consult at one time.

"It ain't Bob Linkin id infringe the rules of hospitality," said the hunter; "but this hyur's a peculiar case, an' I don't like the look of that 'ar priest, nobow yer kin fix it."

Raoul, however, sided with the contrabandista, and explained to Lincoln that the padre was the peaceable cure of the neighboring village, and the friend of Don Antonio; and the hunter, seeing that I did not interpose—for at the moment I was in one of those moods of abstraction, and scarcely noticed what was going on—permitted the priest to pass out. I was recalled to myself more by some peculiar expressions which I heard Lincoln muttering after it was over than by the incidents of the scene itself.

The occurrence had rendered us all somewhat uneasy; and we resolved upon swallowing our suppers hastily, and, after pushing forward some distance, to sleep in the woods.

The tortillas were by this time ready, and the pretty Jesusita was pouring out the chocolate; so we set to work like men who had appetites.

The supper was soon despatched, but our host had some *puros* in the house—a luxury we had not enjoyed lately; and hating to hurry away from such comfortable quarters, we determined to stay and take a smoke.

We had hardly lit our cigars when Jesusita, who had gone to the door, came hastily back, exclaiming—

"Papa—papa! hay gente fuera!" (Papa, there are people outside!)

As we sprung to our feet, several shadows appeared through the open walls. Lincoln seized his rifle and ran to the door. The next moment he rushed back, shouting out—

"Hell! I told yer so!" And, dashing his huge body against the back of the rancho, he broke through the cane pickets with a crash.

We were hastening to follow him when the frail structure gave way; and we found ourselves buried, along with our host and his women, under a heavy thatch of saplings and palm-leaves.

We heard the crack of our comrade's rifle without—the scream of a victim—the reports of pistols and escopettes—the yelling of savage men; and then the roof was raised again, and we were pulled out and dragged down among trees, and tied to their trunks, and taunted, and goaded, and kicked, and cuffed, by the most villainous-looking set of desperadoes it has ever been my misfortune to fall among. They seemed to take delight in abusing us—yelling all the while, like so many demons let loose from the prisons of "*los infernos*."

Our late acquaintance—the cure—was among them; and it was plain that he had brought the party on us. His "reverence" looked high and low for Lincoln; but, to his great mortification, the hunter had escaped.

CHAPTER XLVI.

PADRE JARAUTA.

WE were not long in learning into whose hands we had fallen; for the name "*Jarauta*" was on every tongue. They were the dreaded "*Jarochos*" of the bandit priest.

"We're in for it now," said Raoul, deeply mortified at the part he had taken in the affair with the cure. "It's a wonder they have kept us so long. Perhaps he's not here himself, and they're waiting for him."

As Raoul said this the clatter of hoofs sounded along the narrow road; and a horseman came galloping up to the rancho, riding over everything and everybody with a perfect recklessness.

"That's Jarauta," whispered Raoul. "If he sees me—but it don't matter much," he added, in a lower tone: "we'll have a quick shrift all the same: he can't more than hang—and that he'll be sure to do."

"Where are these Yankees?" cried Jarauta, leaping out of his saddle.

"Here, captain," answered one of the Jarochos, a hideous-looking griffe, dressed in a scarlet uniform, and apparently the lieutenant of the band.

"How many?"

"Four, captain."

"Very well—what are you waiting for?"

"To know whether I shall hang or shoot them."

"Shoot them, by all means! *Carambo!* we have no time for neck-stretching!"

"There are some nice trees here, captain," suggested another of the band, with as much coolness as if he had been conversing about the hanging of so many dogs. He wished—a curiosity not uncommon—to witness the spectacle of hanging.

"*Madre de Dios!* stupid! I tell you we haven't time for such silly sport. Out with you there! Sanchez! Gabriel! Carlos! send your bullets through their Saxon skulls! Quick!"

Several of the Jarochos commenced unslinging their carbines, while those who guarded us fell back, to be out of range of the lead.

"Come," exclaimed Raoul, "it can't be worse than this—we can only die; and I'll let the padre know whom he has got, before I take leave of him. I'll give him a *souvenir* that won't make him sleep any sounder to-night. *Oyez, Padre Jarauta!*" continued he, calling out in a tone of irony; "have you found Marguerita yet?"

We could see between us and the dim rushlight that the Jarocha started, as if a shot had passed through his heart.

"Hold!" he shouted to the men, who were about taking aim, "drag those scoundrels hither! A light there!—fire the thatch! *Vaya!*"

In a moment the hut of the contrabandista was in flames, the dry palm-leaves blazing up like flax.

"Merciful heavens! they are going to roast us!"

With this horrible apprehension, we were dragged up toward the burning pile, close to which stood our fierce judge and executioner.

The bamboos blazed and crackled, and under their red glare we could now see our captors with a terrible distinctness. A more demon-like set, I think, could not have been found anywhere out of the infernal regions.

A single glance at this motley crew would have convinced us, had we not been quite sure of it already, that we had no favor to expect. There was not a countenance among them that exhibited the slightest trait of grace or mercy. No such expression could be seen around us, and we felt satisfied that our time had come.

The appearance of their leader did not shake this conviction. Revenge and hatred were playing upon his sharp sallow features, and his

thin lips quivered with an expression of malice, plainly habitual. His nose, like a parrot's beak, had been broken by a blow, which added to its sinister shape; and his small black eyes twinkled with metallic brightness.

He wore a purplish-colored manga, that covered his whole body, and his feet were cased in the red leather boots of the country, with heavy silver spurs strapped over them. A black sombrero, with its band of gold bullion and tags of the same material completed the *tout ensemble* of his costume. He wore neither beard nor mustache; but his hair, black and snaky, hung down trailing over the velvet embroidery of his manga.

Such was the Padre Jarauta.

Raoul's face was before him, upon which he looked for some moments without speaking. His features twitched as if under galvanic action, and we could see that his fingers jerked in a similar manner.

They were painful memories that could produce this effect upon a heart of such iron devilry, and Raoul alone knew them. The latter seemed to enjoy the interlude; for he lay upon the ground, looking up at the Jaracho with a smile of triumph upon his reckless features.

We were expecting the next speech of the padre to be an order for flinging us into the fire, which now burned fiercely. Fortunately, this fancy did not seem to strike him just then.

"Ha, monsieur!" exclaimed he at length, approaching Raoul. "I dreamt that you and I would meet again; I dreamt it—ha! ha! ha! it was a pleasant dream, but not half so pleasant as the reality—ha! ha! ha! Don't you think so?" he added, striking our comrade over the face with a mule quirt. "Don't you think so?" he repeated, lashing him as before, while his eyes sparkled with fiendish malignity.

"Did you dream of meeting Marguerita again?" inquired Raoul, with a satirical laugh, that sounded strange, even fearful under the circumstances.

I shall never forget the expression of the Jaracho at that moment. His sallow face turned black, his lips white, his eyes burned like a demon's, and springing forward with a fierce oath, he planted his iron-shod heel upon the face of our comrade. The skin peeled off, and the blood followed.

There was something so cowardly—so redolent of a brutal ferocity—in the act, that I could not remain quiet. With a desperate wrench I freed my hands, skinning my wrists in the effort, and flinging myself upon him, I clutched at the monster's throat.

He stepped back; my ankles were tied, and I fell upon my face at his feet.

"Hol hol!" cried he, "what have we here? An officer, eh? Come!" he continued, "rise up from your prayers, and let me look at you. Ha! a captain! And this?—a lieutenant! Gentlemen, you're too dainty to be shot like common dogs; we'll not let the wolves have you; we'll put you out of their reach; ha! ha! ha! Out of reach of wolves, do you hear? And what's this?" continued he, turning to Chane, and examining his shoulders. "Bah! a common soldier—an Irishman. What do you do fighting among these heretics against your own religion? There, renegade!" and he kicked the Irishman in the ribs.

"Thank yer honner!" said Chane, with a grunt; "small fayvors thankfully received; much good may it do yer honner!"

"Here, Lopez!" shouted the brigand.

"Now for the fire!" thought we.

"Lopez, I say!" continued he, calling louder.

"Aca! aca!" answered a voice, and the griffe who had guarded us came up, swinging his scarlet manga.

"Lopez, these I perceive are gentlemen of rank, and we must usher them into Hades a little more gracefully, do you hear?"

"Yes, captain," answered the other, with stoical composure.

"Over the cliffs, Lopez. Over the cliffs, do you hear?"

"Yes, captain," repeated the Jaracho, moving only his lips.

"You will have them at the Eagle's Cave by six in the morning; by six, do you hear?"

"Yes, captain," again replied the subordinate.

"And if any of them is missing—is missing, do you hear?"

"Yes, captain."

"You will take his place in the dance—the dance—ha! ha! ha! You understand that, L. Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

"Enough then, good Lopez—handsome Lopez! beautiful Lopez!—enough, and good-night to you!"

So saying, the Jaracho drew his quirt several times across the red cheek of Raoul, and with a curse upon his lips he leaped upon his mustang and galloped off.

Whatever might be the nature of the punishment that awaited us at the Eagle's Cave, it was evident that Lopez had no intention of becoming proxy in it for any of us. This was plain from the manner in which he set about

securing us. We were first gagged with bayonet-shanks, and then dragged out into the bushes.

Here we were thrown upon our backs, each of us in the center of four trees that formed a parallelogram. Our arms and legs were stretched to their full extent, and tied severally to the trees; and thus we lay, spread out like raw hides to dry. Our savage captors drew the cords so taut that our joints cracked under the cruel tension. In this painful position, with a Jaracho standing over each of us, we passed the remainder of the night.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A HANG BY THE HEELS.

IT WAS a long night—the longest I can remember; a night that fully illustrated the horror of monotony. I can compare our feelings to those of one under the influence of the nightmare. But, no—worse than that. Our savage sentries occasionally sat down upon our bodies, and, lighting their cigarritos, chatted gayly while we groaned. We could not protest; we were gagged. But it would have made little difference; they would only have mocked us the more.

We lay glaring upon the moon as she coursed through a cloudy heaven. The wind whistled through the leaves, and its melancholy moaning sounded like our death-dirge. Several times through the night I heard the howl of the prairie wolf, and I knew it was Lincoln; but the Jarochos had pickets all around, and the hunter dared not approach our position. He could not have helped us.

The morning broke at last; and we were taken up, tied upon the backs of vicious mules, and hurried off through the woods. We traveled for some distance along a ridge, until we had reached its highest point, where the cliff beetled over. Here we were unpacked and thrown upon the grass. About thirty of the Jarochos guarded us, and we now saw them under the broad light of day; but they did not look a whit more beautiful than they had appeared under the glare of the blazing rancho the preceding night.

Lopez was at their head, and never relaxed his vigilance for a moment. It was plain that he considered the padre a man of his word.

After we had remained about half-an-hour on the brow of the cliff, an exclamation from one of the men drew our attention; and, looking round, we perceived a band of horsemen straggling up the hill at a slow gallop. It was Jarauta, with about fifty of his followers. They were soon close up to us.

"Buenos dias caballeros!" cried their leader, in a mocking tone, leaping down and approaching us. "I hope you passed the night comfortably. Lopez, I am sure, provided you with good beds. Didn't you, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain," answered the laconic Lopez. "The gentlemen rested well; didn't they Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

"No kicking or tumbling about, eh?"

"No, captain."

"Oh! then they rested well; it's a good thing; they have a long journey before them—haven't they, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

"I hope, gentlemen, you are ready for the road. Do you think you are ready?"

As each of us had the shank of a bayonet between his teeth, besides being tied neck and heels, it is not likely that this interrogatory received a reply; nor did his "reverence" expect any, as he continued putting similar questions in quick succession, appealing occasionally to his lieutenant for an answer. The latter, who was of the taciturn school, contented himself, and his superior too, with a simple "yes" or "no."

Up to this moment we had no knowledge of the fate that awaited us. We knew we had to die—that we knew; but in what way we were still ignorant. I, for one, had made up my mind that the padre intended pitching us over the cliffs.

We were at length enlightened upon this important point. We were not to take that awful leap into eternity which I had been picturing to myself. A fate more horrible still awaited us. We were to be hanged over the precipice!

As if to aid the monster in his inhuman design, several pine-trees grew out horizontally from the edge of the cliff; and over the branches of these the Jarochos commenced reaving their long laces. Expert in the handling of ropes, as all Mexicans are, they were not long in completing their preparations, and we soon beheld our gallows.

"According to rank, Lopez," cried Jarauta, seeing that all was ready; "the captain first—do you hear?"

"Yes, captain," answered the imperturbable brigand who superintended the operations.

"I shall keep you to the last, monsieur," said the priest, addressing Raoul; "you will have the pleasure of bringing up the rear in your passage through purgatory. Ha! ha! ha! Won't he, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

"Maybe some of you would like a priest,

gentlemen." This Jarauta uttered with an ironical grin that was revolting to behold. "If you would," he continued, "say so. I sometimes officiate in that capacity myself. Don't I, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

A diabolical laugh burst from the Jarochos, who had dismounted and were standing out upon the cliff, the better to witness the spectacle of our hanging.

"Well, Lopez, does any of them say 'yes'?"

"No, captain."

"Ask the Irishman there; ask him—he ought to be a good Catholic."

The question was put to Chane, in mockery, of course, for it was impossible for him to answer it; and yet he *did* answer it, for his look spoke a curse as plainly as if it had been uttered through a trumpet. The Jarochos did not heed that, but only laughed the louder.

"Well, Lopez, what says St. Patrick? 'Yes' or 'no'?"

"No, captain."

And a fresh peal of ruffian laughter rung out.

The rope was now placed around my neck in a running noose. The other end had been passed over the tree and lay coiled near the edge of the cliff. Lopez held it in his hand a short distance above the coil, in order to direct its movements.

"All ready there, Lopez?" cried the leader.

"Yes, captain."

"Swing off the captain, then—no, not yet; let him look at the floor on which he is going to dance; that is but fair."

I had been drawn forward until my feet projected over the edge of the precipice and close to the root of the tree. I was now forced into a sitting posture, so that I might look below, my limbs hanging over. Strange to say, I could not resist doing exactly what my tormentor wished. Under other circumstances the sight would have been to me appalling; but my nerves were strung by the protracted agony I had been forced to endure.

The precipice, on whose verge I sat, formed a side of one of those yawning gulfs common in Spanish America, and known by the name *barancas*. It seemed as if a mountain had been scooped out and carried away. Not two hundred yards horizontally distant was the twin jaw of the chasm, like a black burnt wall; yet the torrent that roared and foamed between them was full six hundred feet below my position! I could have flung the stump of a cigar upon the water; in fact, an object dropping vertically from where I sat—for it was a projecting point—must have fallen plumb into the stream.

It was not unlike the canyon where we had tossed over the dogs; but it was higher and altogether more hell-like and horrible.

As I looked down, several small birds, whose species I did not stay to distinguish, were screaming below, and an eagle, on his broad, bold wing, came soaring over the abyss, and flapped up to my very face.

"Well, captain," broke in the sharp voice of Jarauta, "what do you think of it? A nice soft floor to dance upon, isn't it, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

"All ready there? Stop! some music; we must have music; how can he dance without music? *Hola, Sanchez!* where's your bugle?"

"Here, captain!"

"Strike up then! Play 'Yankee Doodle.' Ha! ha! ha! 'Yankee Doodle,' do you hear?"

"Yes, captain," answered the man; and the next moment the well-known strains of the American national air sounded upon my ear, producing a strange, sad feeling I shall never forget.

"Now, Lopez!" cried the padre.

I was expecting to be swung out, when I heard him again shout "Stay!" at the same time stopping the music.

"By heavens! Lopez, I have a better plan," he cried; "why did I not think of it before? It's not too late yet. Ha! ha! ha! *Carambo!* They shall dance upon their heads! That's better—isn't it, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

A cheer from the Jarochos announced their approval of this change in the programme.

The padre made a sign to Lopez, who approached him, appearing to receive some directions.

I did not at first comprehend the novelty that was about to be introduced. I was not kept long in ignorance. One of the Jarochos, seizing me by the collar, dragged me back from the ledge, and transferred the noose from my neck to my ankles. Horror heaped upon horror! I was to be *hung head downward!*

"That will be much prettier—won't it, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

"The gentleman will have time to make himself ready for heaven before he dies—won't he, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

"Take out the gag—let him have his tongue free; he'll need that to pray with—won't he, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

One of the Jarochos jerked the bayonet roughly from my mouth, almost dislocating my jaw. The power of speech was gone. I could not, if I had wished it, have uttered an intelligible word.

"Give him his hands, too; he'll need them to keep off the vultures—won't he, Lopez?"

"Yes, captain."

The thong that bound my wrists was cut, leaving my hands free. I was on my back, my feet toward the precipice. A little to my right stood Lopez, holding the rope that was about to launch me into eternity.

"Now the music—take the music for your cue, Lopez; then jerk him up!" cried the sharp voice of the fiend.

I shut my eyes, waiting for the pull. It was but a moment, but it seemed a lifetime. There was a dead silence—a stillness like that which precedes the bursting of a rock or the firing of a jubilee-gun. Then I heard the first note of the bugle, and along with it a crack—the crack of a rifle! A man staggered over me, besprinkling my face with blood; and falling forward, disappeared!

Then came the pluck upon my ankles, and I was jerked, head downward, into the empty air. I felt my feet touching the branches above, and, throwing up my arms, I grasped one, and swung my body upward. After two or three efforts, I lay along the main trunk, which I embraced with the hug of despair. I looked downward. A man was hanging below—far below—at the end of the lazo! It was Lopez; I knew his scarlet manga at a glance. He was hanging by the thigh in a snarl of the rope.

His hat had fallen off. I could see the red blood running over his face, and dripping from his long, snaky locks. He hung head down. I could see that he was dead!

The hard thong was cutting my ankles, and—oh, Heaven!—under our united weight the roots were cracking!

Appalling thought! "*The tree will give way!*" I held fast with one arm. I drew forth my knife—fortunately I still had one—with the other. I opened the blade with my teeth, and, stretching backward and downward, I drew it across the thong. It parted with a "snig," and the red object left me like a flash of light. There was a plunge upon the black water below—a plunge and a few white bubbles; but the body of the Jarochos, with its scarlet trappings, was seen no more after that plunge.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A VERY SHORT TRIAL.

DURING all this time shots were ringing over me. I could hear the shouts and cheering of men, the trampling of heavy hoofs, and the clashing of sabers. I knew that some strange deliverance had reached us. I knew that a skirmish was going on above me; but I could see nothing. I was below the level of the cliff.

I lay in a terrible suspense, listening. I dared not change my posture—I dared not move. The weight of the Jarochos's body had hitherto held my feet securely in the notch; but that was gone, and my ankles were still tied. A movement, and my legs might fall off the limb and drag me downward. I was faint, too, from the protracted struggle for life and death, and I hugged the tree and held on like a wounded squirrel.

The shots seemed less frequent; the shouts appeared to recede from the cliffs. Then I heard a cheer—an Anglo-Saxon cheer—an American cheer; and the next moment a well-known voice rung in my ears:

"By the livin' catamount! he's hyur yet. Whooray, whoop! Niver say die! Hold on, cap'n, teeth and toenail! Hyur, boys! clutch on, a lot o' yer. Quick!—hook my claws, Nat! Now pull—allthegether! Hooray!"

I felt a strong hand grasping the collar of my coat, and the next moment I was raised from my perch and landed upon the top of the cliff.

I looked around upon my deliverers. Lincoln was dancing like a lunatic, uttering his wild, half-Indian yells. A dozen men, in the dark green uniform of the "mounted rifles," stood looking on and laughing at this grotesque exhibition. Close by, another party were guarding some prisoners; while a hundred others were seen in scattered groups along the ridge, returning from the pursuit of the Jarochos, whom they had completely routed.

I recognized Twing, and Hennessy, and Hillis, and several other officers whom I had met before. We were soon *en rapport*, and I could not have received a greater variety of congratulations had it been the hour after my wedding.

Little Jack was the guide of the rescue.

After a moment spent in explanation with the major, I turned to look for Lincoln. He was standing close by, holding in his hand a piece of lazo, which he appeared to examine with a strange and puzzled expression. He had recovered from his burst of wild joy, and was "himself again."

"What's the matter, Bob?" I inquired, noticing his bewildered look.

"Why, cap'n, I'm a sorter bamfuzzled yee. I kin understan' well enuf how the feller jerked

yer inter the tree, afore he let go. But how did this hyur whang kum cut? an' whar's the other eend?"

I saw that he held in his hand the noose of the lazo which he had taken from my ankles, and I explained the mystery of how it had "kum cut." This seemed to raise me still higher in the hunter's esteem. Turning to one of the riflemen, an old hunter like himself, he whispered—I overheard him:

"I'll tell yer what it is, Nat, he kin whip his weight in wildcats or grizzly b'ars any day in the year—he kin, or my name ain't Bob Lin-kin."

Saying this, he stepped forward on the cliff and looked over; and then he examined the tree, and then the piece of lazo, and then the tree again, and then he commenced dropping pebbles down, as if he was determined to measure every object and fix it in his memory with a proper distinctness.

Twing and the others had now dismounted. As I turned toward them, Clayley was taking a pull at the major's pewter—and a good long pull, too. I followed the lieutenant's example, and felt the better for it.

"But how did you find us, major?"

"This little soldier," said he, pointing to Jack, "brought us to the rancho where you were taken. From there we easily tracked you to a large hacienda."

"Hal! you routed the guerrilla, then?"

"Routed the guerrilla! We saw no guerrilla."

"What! at the hacienda?"

"Peons and women—nothing more. Yes, there was, too—what am I thinking about? There was a party there that routed us; Thornley and Hillis, here, have both been wounded, and are not likely to recover—poor fellows!"

I looked toward these gentlemen for an explanation. They were both laughing, and I looked in vain.

"Hennessy, too," said the major, "has got a stab under the ribs."

"Och, by my sowl have I, and no mistake!" cried the latter.

"Come, major—an explanation, if you please."

I was in no humor to enjoy this joke. I half divined the cause of their mirth, and it produced in me an unaccountable feeling of annoyance, not to say pain.

"Be my faith, then, captain," said Hennessy, speaking for the major, "if ye must know all about it, I'll tell ye myself. We overhauled a pair of the most elegant crayteurs you ever clapp'd eyes upon; and rich—rich as Craysus—wasn't they, boys?"

"Oh! plenty of tin," remarked Hillis.

"But, captain," continued Hennessy, "how they took on to your 'tiger'! I thought they would have eaten the little chap, body, bones, and all."

I was chafing with impatience to know more, but I saw that nothing worth knowing could be had in that quarter. I determined, therefore, to conceal my anxiety, and find an early opportunity to talk to Jack.

"But beyond the hacienda?" I inquired, changing the subject.

"We trailed you down stream to the canyon, where we found blood upon the rocks. Here we were at fault, when a handsome, delicate-looking lad, known somehow or other to your Jack, came up and carried us to the crossing above, where the lad gave us the slip, and we saw no more of him. We struck the hoofs again where he left us, and followed them to a small prairie on the edge of the woods, where the ground was strangely broken and trampled. There they had turned back, and we lost all trace."

"But how then did you come here?"

"By accident altogether. We were striking to the nearest point on the National Road, when that tall sergeant of yours dropped down upon us out of the branches of a tree."

"Whom did you see, Jack?" I whispered to the boy, after having drawn him aside.

"I saw them all, captain."

"Well?"

"They asked me where you were; and when I told them—"

"Well—well?"

"They appeared to wonder—"

"Well?"

"And the young ladies—"

"And the young ladies?"

"They ran round, and cried, and—"

Jack was the dove that brought the olive-branch.

"Did they say where they were going?" I inquired, after one of those sweet waking dreams.

"Yes, captain, they are going up the country to live."

"Where—where?"

"I could not recollect the name, it was so strange."

"Jalapa? Orizava? Cordova? Puebla? Mexico?"

"I think it was one of them, but I cannot tell which. I have forgotten it, captain."

"Captain Haller!" called the voice of the major; "here a moment, if you please. These

are some of the men who were going to hang you, are they not?"

Twing pointed to five of the Jarochos, who had been captured in the skirmish.

"Yes," replied I, "I think so; yet I could not swear to their identity."

"By the crass, major! I can swear to every mother's son av thim: there isn't a scoundrel among thim but has given me rayzon to remind him, iv a harty kick in the ribs might be called a rayzon. O—h! ye ugly spalpeens! kick me now, will yez?—will yez jist be pl'azed to trid upon the tail av my jacket?"

"Stand out here, my man!" said the major.

Chane stepped forward, and swore away the lives of the five Jarochos in less than as many minutes.

"Enough!" said the major, after the Irishman had given his testimony. "Lieutenant Claiborne," continued he, addressing an officer the youngest in rank, "What sentence?"

"Hang!" replied the latter in a solemn voice.

"Lieutenant Hillis?"

"Hang!" was the reply.

"Lieutenant Clayley?"

"Hang!" said Clayley, in a quick and emphatic tone.

"Captain Hennessy?"

"Hang them!" answered the Irishman.

"Captain Haller?"

"Have you determined, Major Twing—" I asked, intending, if possible, to mitigate this terrible sentence.

"We have no time, Captain Haller," replied my superior, interrupting me, "nor opportunity, to carry prisoners. Our army has reached Plan del Rio, and is preparing to attack the pass. An hour lost, and we may be too late for the battle. You know the result of that as well as I."

I knew Twing's determined character too well to offer further opposition, and the Jarochos were condemned to be hung.

The following extract from the major's report of the affair will show how the sentence was carried out:—

"We killed five of them and captured as many more, but the leader escaped. The prisoners were tried, and sentenced to be hung. They had a gallows already rigged for Captain Haller and his companions; and, for want of a better, we hanged them upon that."

CHAPTER XLIX.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF A BATTLE.

It was still only an hour by sun as we rode off from the Eagle's Cave. At some distance I turned in my saddle and looked back. It was a singular sight, those five hanging corpses, and one not easily forgotten. What an appalling picture it must have been to their own comrades, who, doubtless, watched the spectacle from some distant elevation!

Before we had ridden out of sight, the Eagle's Cliff was black with zopilotes, hundreds clustering upon the pines, and whetting their fetid beaks over their prey, still warm. I could not help being struck with this strange transposition of victims.

We forded the stream below, and traveled for some hours in a westerly course, over a half-naked ridge. At mid-day we reached an arroyo—a clear, cool stream that gurgled along under a thick grove of the *palma redonda*. Here we "nooned," stretching our bodies along the greensward.

At sundown we rode into the *pueblito* of Jacomulco, where we had determined to pass the night. Twing levied on the *alcalde* for forage for "man and beast." The horses were picketed in the plaza, while the men bivouacked by their fires—strong mounted pickets having been thrown out on the roads or tracks that led to the village.

By daybreak we were again in our saddles, and, riding across another ridge, we struck the Plan river five miles above the bridge, and commenced riding down the stream. We were still far from the water, which roared and "soughed" in the bottom of a barranca, hundreds of feet below our path.

On crossing an eminence a sight suddenly burst upon us that caused us to leap up in our saddles. Directly before us, and not a mile distant, rose a high round hill like a semi-globe; and from a small tower upon its top waved the standard of Mexico.

Long lines of uniformed men girdled the tower, formed in rank. Horsemen in bright dresses galloped up and down the hill. We could see the glitter of brazen helmets, and the glancing of a thousand bayonets. The burnished howitzer flashed in the sunbeams, and we could discern the cannoniers standing by their posts. Bugles were braying and drums rolling. So near were they that we could distinguish the call. *They were sounding the "long roll!"*

"Halt! Great Heaven!" cried Twing, jerking his horse upon his haunches; "we are riding into the enemy's camp! Guide!" he added, turning fiercely to Raoul, and half drawing his sword, "what's this?"

"The hill, major," replied the soldier coolly, "is El Telegrafo." It is the Mexican headquarters, I take it."

"And, sir, what mean you? It is not a mile distant!"

"It is ten miles, major."

"Ten! Why, sir, I can trace the eagle upon that flag—it is not one mile, by Heaven!"

"By the eye, true; but by the road, major, it is what I have said—ten miles. We passed the crossing of the barranca some time ago; there is no other before we reach El Plan."

It was true. Although within range of the enemy's lightest metal, we were ten miles off!

A vast chasm yawned between us and them. The next moment we were upon its brink, and, wheeling sharply to the right, we trotted on as fast as the rocky road would allow us.

"Oh, Heavens! Haller, we shall be too late. Gallop!" shouted Twing, as we pressed our horses side by side. The troop at the word sprang into a gallop. El Plan, the bridge, the hamlet, the American camp, with its thousand white pyramids, all burst upon us like a flash—below—far below—lying like a map. We were still opposite El Telegrafo!

"By Heavens!" cried Twing, "our camp is empty!"

A few figures were only visible, straggling among the tents: the teamster, the camp-guard, the invalid soldier.

"Look! look!"

I followed the direction indicated. Against the long ridge that rose over the camp a dark-blue line could be traced—a line of uniformed men, glistening as they moved with the sparkle of ten thousand bayonets. It wound along the hill like a bristling snake, and, heading toward El Telegrafo, disappeared for a moment behind the ridge.

A gun from the globe-shaped hill—and then another! another! another!—a roll of musketry!—drums—bugles—shouts—cheering!

"The battle's begun!"

"We are too late!"

We were still eight miles from the scene of action. We checked up, and sat chafing in our saddles.

And now the roll of musketry became incessant, and we could hear the "crack—crack" of the American rifles. And bombs hurtled and rockets hissed through the air.

The round hill was shrouded in a cloud of sulphur; and through the smoke we could see small parties creeping up, from rock to rock, from bush to bush, firing as they went. We could see some tumbling back under the leaden hail that was poured upon them from above. And then a strong band debouched from the woods below, and strained upward, daring all danger. Up, up!—and bayonets were crossed, and sabres glistened and grew red—and wild cries filled the air. And then came a cheer, long, loud, and exulting, and under the thinning smoke thousands were seen rushing down the steep, and flinging themselves into the woods.

We knew not as yet which party it was that were thus flying. We looked at the tower in breathless suspense. The cloud was around its base, where musketry was still rolling, sending its deadly missiles after the fugitives below.

"Look! look!" cried a voice—"the Mexican flag—it is down! See! 'the star spangled banner!'"

The American standard was slowly unfolding itself over the blue smoke, and we could easily distinguish the stripes, and the dark square in the corner with its silvery stars; and, as if with one voice, our troops broke into a wild "hurrah!"

In less time than you have to take in reading this account of it, the battle of Cerro Gordo was lost and won.

CHAPTER L.

A DUEL WITH AN ODD ENDING.

AFTER the battle of Cerro Gordo, our victorious troops pursued the enemy on to Jalapa, where the army halted to bring up its wounded, and prepare for an advance upon the capital of Mexico.

The Jalapenos did not receive us inhospitably—nor the Jalapenas either. They expected, as a matter of course, that we would sack their beautiful city. This we did not do, and their gratitude enabled our officers to pass their time somewhat agreeably. The gay round that always succeeds a battle—for dead comrades are soon forgotten amidst congratulations and new titles—had no fascination for me.

The balls, the tertulias, the dias de campo, were alike insipid and tiresome. She was not there—and where? I knew not. I might never see her again. All I knew was that they had gone up the country—perhaps to Cordova or Orizava.

Clayley shared my feelings. The bright eyes in the balconies, the sweet voices in the orange-shaded patios of Jalapa, had neither brightness nor music for us. We were both thoroughly miserable.

To add to this unhappy state of things, a bad feeling had sprung up among the officers of our army—a jealousy between the old and the new. It was the child of idleness and a long spell of garrison duty. On the eve of a battle it always disappeared. I have adverted to this, not that it might interest the reader, but as explaining a result connected with myself.

One of the most prominent actors in this quarrel, on the side of the "old regulars," was a young officer named Ransom, a captain in an infantry regiment. He was a good fellow in other respects, and a brave soldier, I believe; his chief weakness lay in a claim to be identified with the "aristocracy," and it so happened that in tumbling over some old family papers, I had found a receipt from the gallant captain's grandfather to my own progenitor, acknowledging the payment of a bill for leather breeches!

It also happened that this very receipt was in my portmanteau at the time; and, nettled at the "carrying on" of the tailor's grandson, I drew it forth and spread it out upon the mess-table. My brethren of the mess were highly tickled at the document, several of them copying it off for future use.

A copy soon reached Ransom, who in his hour of indignation made use of certain expressions that, in their turn, soon reached me.

The result was a challenge borne by my friend Clayley, and the affair was arranged for the following morning.

The place chosen for our morning's diversion was a sequestered spot upon the banks of the river Zedena, and along the solitary road that leads out toward the Cofre de Perote.

At sunrise we rode out in two carriages, six of us, including our seconds and surgeons. About a mile from town we halted, and, leaving the carriages upon the road, crossed over into a small glade, in the midst of the chaparral.

The ground was soon lined off—ten paces—and we took our stands, back to back. We were to wheel at the word "Ready!" and fire at "One, two, three!"

We were waiting for the word, with that deathlike silence which always precedes a similar signal, when Little Jack, who had been left with the carriages, rushed into the glade, calling with all his might:

"Captain! captain!"

Every face was turned upon him with scowling inquiry, when the boy, gasping for breath, shouted out:

"The Mexicans are on the road!"

The words had scarcely passed his lips when the trampling of hoofs sounded in our ears, and the next moment a band of horsemen came driving pell-mell into the opening. At a single glance we recognized the guerrilla!

Ransom, who was nearest, blazed away at the foremost of the band, missing his aim. With a spring the guerrillero was over him, his saber raised for the blow. I fired, and the Mexican leaped from his saddle with a groan.

"Thank you, Haller," cried my antagonist, as we rushed side by side toward the pistols. There were four pairs in all, and the surgeons and seconds had already armed themselves, and were pointing their weapons at the enemy. We seized the remaining two, cocking them as we turned.

At this moment my eye fell upon a black horse, and looking, I recognized the rider. He saw and recognized me at the same moment, and driving the spurs into his horse's flanks, sprang forward with a yell. With one bound he was over me, his white teeth gleaming like a tiger's. His saber flashed in my eyes—I fired—a heavy body dashed against me—I was struck senseless to the earth!

I was only stunned, and in a few moments I came to my senses. Shots and shouts rung around me. I heard the trampling of hoofs and the groans of wounded men.

I looked up. Horsemen in dark uniforms were galloping across the glade, and into the woods beyond. I recognized the yellow facings of the American dragoons.

I drew my hand over my face; it was wet with blood. A heavy body lay across mine, which Little Jack, with all his strength, was endeavoring to drag off. I crawled from under it, and bending over, looked at the features. I knew them at a glance. I muttered to my servant:

"Dubrosc! He is dead!"

His body lay spread out in its picturesque attire. A fair form it was. A bullet—my own—had passed through his heart, killing him instantly. I placed my hand upon his forehead. It was cold already, and his beautiful features were white and ashy. His eyes glared with the ghastly expression of death.

"Close them," I said to the boy, and turned away from the spot.

Wounded men lay around, dragoons and Mexicans, and some were already dead.

A party of officers was at the moment returning from the pursuit, and I recognized my late adversary, with our seconds and surgeons. My friend Clayley had been wounded in the *melee*, and I observed that he carried his arm in a sling. A dragoon officer galloped up.

It was Colonel Harding.

"These fellows, gentlemen," cried he, reining up his horse, "just came in time to relieve me from a disagreeable duty. I have orders from the commander-in-chief to arrest Captains Haller and Ransom."

"Now, gentlemen," he continued, with a smile, "I think you have had fighting enough

for one morning, and if you will promise me to be quiet young men, and keep the peace, I shall, for once in my life, take the liberty of disobeying a general's orders. What say you, gentlemen?"

It needed not this appeal. There had been no serious cause of quarrel between my adversary and myself, and, moved by a similar impulse, we both stepped forward, and grasped one another by the hand.

"Forgive me, my dear Haller," said Ransom, "I retract all. I assure you my remarks were only made upon the spur of the moment, when I was angry about those cursed leather breeches."

"And I regret to have given you cause," I replied. "Come with me to my quarters. Let us have a glass of wine together, and we shall light our cigars with the villainous document."

A burst of laughter followed, in which Ransom good-naturedly joined; and we were soon on our way to town, seated in the same carriage, and the best friends in creation.

CHAPTER LI.

AN ADIOS.

ONE day Clayley and I were sitting over our wine, along with a gay party of friends, in the Fonda de Diligencias, the principal hotel of Jalapa, when Jack touched me on the shoulder and whispered in my ear:

"Captain, there's a Mexican wants to see ye."

"Who is it?" I demanded, somewhat annoyed at the interruption.

"It's the brother," replied Jack, still speaking in a whisper.

"The brother! What brother?"

"Of the young ladies, capt in."

I started from my chair, overturning a decanter and several glasses.

"Hilloa! what's the matter?" shouted several voices, in a breath.

"Gentlemen, will you excuse me?—one moment only—I—I—will—"

"Certainly! certainly!" cried my companions, all at once, wondering what *was* the matter.

The next moment I was in the *ante-sala*, embracing Narcisso.

"And so you are all here. When did you arrive?"

"Yesterday, captain. I came to town for you, but could not find you."

"And they are well?—all well?"

"Yes, captain. Papa expects you will come this evening, with the lieutenant and the other officer."

"The other officer! Who, Narcisso?"

"I think he was with you on your first visit to La Virgen—*un señor gordo*."

"Oh! the major! Yes, yes, we shall come; but where have you been since we met, Narcisso?"

"To Orizava. Papa has a tobacco farm near Orizava; he always goes to it when he comes up here. But, captain, we were so astonished to hear from your people that you had been a prisoner and traveling along with us! We knew that guerrillos had some American prisoners, but we never dreamed of its being you. *Currambo*, if I had known that!"

"But how came you, Narcisso, to be with the guerrilla?"

"Oh! papa had many things to carry up the country; and he, with some other families, paid Colonel Cenobio for an escort—the country is so full of robbers."

"Ah! sure. Tell me, Narcisso, how came I by this?"

I held out the dagger.

"I know not, captain. I am ashamed to tell you that I lost it the day after you gave it me."

"Oh! never mind. Take it again, and say to your papa I shall come and bring *'el señor gordo'* along with me."

"You will know the way, captain? Yonder is our house." And the lad pointed to the white turrets of an aristocratic-looking mansion that appeared over the tree-tops, about a mile distant from the town.

"I shall easily find it."

"Adieu, then, captain; we shall be impatient until you arrive—*hasta la tarde!*"

So saying, the youth departed.

I communicated to Clayley the cause of my temporary withdrawal; and seizing the earliest opportunity, we left our companions over their cups.

It was now near sundown, and we were about to jump into our saddles when I recollected my promise to bring the major. Clayley proposed leaving him behind and planning an apology; but a hint that he might be useful in "keeping off" Don Cosme and the senora caused the lieu-

tenant suddenly to change his tactics, and we set out for Blossom's quarters.

We had no difficulty in persuading "el señor gordo" to accompany us, as soon as he ascertained where we were going. He had never ceased to remember that dinner. Hercules was brought out and saddled, and we all three galloped off for the mansion of our friends.

After passing under the shadows of green trees, and through copses filled with bright flowers, we arrived at the house, one of the fairest mansions it has ever been our fortune to enter. We were just in time to enjoy the soft twilight of an eternal spring—of a landscape *siempre verde*; and, what was more to the major's mind, in time for a supper that rivaled the well-remembered dinner.

As I had anticipated, the major proved exceedingly useful during the visit. In his capacity of quartermaster, he had already picked up a little Spanish—enough to hold Don Cosme in check over the wine; while Clayley and myself, with "Lupe" and "Luz," walked out into the veranda to "take a peep at the moon." Her light was alluring, and we could not resist the temptation of a stroll through the gardens. It was celestial night, and we dallied along under the pictured shadows of the orange trees, and sat upon curiously-formed benches, and gazed upon the moon, and listened to the soft notes of the tropic night-birds.

The perils of the past were all forgotten, and the perils of the future—we thought not of them.

It was late when we said "*buenas noches*" to our friends, and we parted with a mutual "*hasta la mañana*." It is needless to say that we kept our promise in the morning, and made another for the following morning, and kept that, too; and so on till the awful bugle summoned us once more to the "route."

The detail of our actions during these days would have no interest for the reader, though to us the most interesting part of our lives. There was a sameness—a monotony—it is true; but a monotony that both my friend and myself could have endured forever.

I do not even remember the details. All I can remember is, that, on the eve of our march, I found myself "cornering" Don Cosme, and telling him plainly, to his teeth, that I meant to marry one of his daughters; and that my friend—who had not yet learned the "lingo," and had duly commissioned me as his "go-between"—would be most happy to take the other off his hands.

I remember very well, too, Don Cosme's reply, which was given with a half-smile, half-grin—somewhat cold, though not disagreeable in its expression. It was thus:

"Captain, when the war is over."

Don Cosme had no intention that his daughters should become widows before they had fairly been wives.

And we bade adieu once more to the light of love, and walked in the shadow of war; and we toiled up to the high tables of the Andes, and crossed the burning plains of Perote; and we forded the cold streams of the Rio Frio, and climbed the snowy spurs of Popocatepec; and, after many a toilsome march, our bayonets bristled along the borders of the Lake Tezcoco. Here we fought—a death struggle, too—for we knew there was no retreat. But our struggle was crowned with victory, and the starry flag waved over the ancient city of the Aztecs.

Neither my friend nor myself escaped unhurt. We were shot "all over," but, fortunately, no bones were broken, and neither of us was converted into a cripple.

And then came the "piping times of peace;" and Clayley and I spent our days in riding out upon the Jalapa road, watching for that great old family carriage, which, it had been promised, should come.

And it came rumbling along at length, drawn by twelve mules, and deposited its precious load in a palace in the Calle Capuchinas.

And shortly after, two officers in shining uniforms entered the portals of that same palace, sent up their cards, and were admitted on the instant. Ah! these were rare times! But rarer still—for it should only occur once in a man's lifetime—was an hour spent in the little chapel of San Bernardo.

There is a convent—Santa Catarina—the richest in Mexico; the richest, perhaps, in the world. There are nuns there—beautiful creatures—who possess property (some of them being worth a million of dollars); and yet these children of Heaven never look upon the face of man!

About a week after my visit to San Bernardo, I was summoned to the convent, and permitted—a rare privilege for one of my sex—to enter its sacred precincts. It was a painful scene. Poor "Mary of Mercy!" How lovely she looked in her snow-white vestments!—lovelier in her sorrow than I had ever seen her before. May God pour the balm of oblivion into the heart of this erring but repentant angel!

I returned to New Orleans in the latter part of 1848. I was walking one morning along the Levee, with a fair companion on my arm,

when a well-known voice struck on my ear, exclaiming—

"I'll be dog-goned, Row! if it ain't the cap'n!"

I turned, and beheld Raoul and the hunter. They had doffed the regimentals, and were preparing to "start" on a trapping expedition to the Rocky Mountains.

I need not describe our mutual pleasure at meeting, which was more than shared by my wife, who had often made me detail to her the exploits of my comrades. I inquired for Chane. The Irishman, at the breaking up of the "war-troops," had entered one of the old regiments, and was at this time, as Lincoln expressed it, "the first sargint of a kump'ny." I could not permit my old ranging comrades to depart without a *souvenir*. My companion drew off a pair of rings, and presented one to each on the spot. The Frenchman, with the gallantry of a Frenchman, drew his upon his finger; but Lincoln, after trying to do the same declared, with a comical grin, that he couldn't "git the eend of his wipin' stick inter it." He wrapped it up carefully, however, and deposited it in his bullet-pouch.

My friends accompanied us to our hotel, where I found them more appropriate presents than the rings. To Raoul I gave my revolving-pistols, not expecting to have any further use for them myself; and to the hunter, that which he valued more than any other earthly object, the major's "Dutch gun." Doubtless, ere this, the *zundnadel* has slain many a "grisly b'ar," among the wild ravines of the Rocky Mountains.

A few days after, I had a visit from Major Twing, who, with Hillis and others of my old comrades, was on his way to the frontier garrison of Texas. From him I learned that Blossom, on account of his gallant behavior in the affair at La Virgen, had received the brevet of a colonel, and was now employed in the department at Washington.

Courteous reader! I was about to write the word "adieu," when "Little Jack" handed me a letter, bearing the Vera Cruz post-mark. It was dated "La Virgen, November 1, 1849." It concluded as follows:—

"You were a fool for leaving Mexico, and you'll never be half as happy anywhere else as I am here. You would hardly know the 'rancho'—I mean the fields. I have cleared off the weeds, and expect next year to take a couple of hundred bales off the ground. I believe I can raise as good cotton here as in Louisiana; besides, I have a little corner for vanilla. It would do your heart good to see the improvements; and, little Luz, too, takes such an interest in all I do. Haller, I'm the happiest man in creation."

"I dined yesterday with our old friend Cenobio, and you should have seen him when I told him the man he had in his company. I thought he would have split his sides. He's a perfect old trump, this Cenobio, notwithstanding his smuggling propensities."

"By the way, you have heard, I suppose, that our 'other old friend, the padre, has been shot. He took part with Paredes against the government. They caught him at Queretaro, and shot him, with a dozen or so of his 'beauties,' in less than a squirrel's jump."

"And now, my dear Haller, a last word. We all want you to come back. The house at Jalapa is ready for you, and Dona Joaquina says it is yours; and she wants you to come back."

"Don Cosme, too—with whom it appears Lupe was the favorite—he wants you to come back. Old Cenobio, who is still puzzled about how you got the knife to cut through the adobes—he wants you to come back. Luz is fretting after Lupe, and she wants you to come back. And, last of all, I want you to come back. So 'stand not on the order' of your coming, but come at once."

"Yours forever,
"EDWARD CLAYLEY."

THE END.

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